

# AGENDA



DOUBLE ISSUE: HUGH MACDIARMID  
AND SCOTTISH POETRY

# AGENDA

## DAVID JONES SPECIAL ISSUE

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## HUGH MACDIARMID

### BRACKEN HILLS IN AUTUMN

These beds of bracken, climax of the summer's growth  
Are elemental as the sky or sea.  
In still and sunny weather they give back  
The sun's glare with a fixed intensity  
As of steel or glass  
No other foliage has.

There is a menace in their indifference to man  
As in tropical abundance. On gloomy days  
They redouble the sombre heaviness of the sky  
And nurse the thunder. Their dense growth shuts the narrow ways  
Between the hills and draws  
Closer the wide valleys' jaws.

This flinty verdure's vast effusion is the more  
Remarkable for the shortness of its stay.  
From November to May a brown stain on the slopes  
Downbeaten by frost and rain, then in quick array  
The silvery crooks appear  
And the whole host is here.

Useless they may seem to men, and go unused, but cast  
Cartloads of them into a pool where the trout are few  
And soon the swarming animalculae upon them  
Will proportionately increase the fishes too.  
Miracles are never far away  
Save bringing new thought to play.

In summer islanded in these grey-green seas where  
the wind plucks  
The pale underside of the fronds on gusty days  
As a land breeze stirs the white caps in a roadstead  
Glimpses of shy bog-gardens surprise the gaze  
Or rough stuff keeping a ring  
Round a struggling water-spring.

Look closely. Even now bog asphodel spikes, still  
  alight at the tips,  
Sundew lifting white buds like those of the whitlow grass  
On walls in spring over its little round leaves  
Sparkling with gummy red hairs, and many a soft mass  
    Of the curious moss that can clean  
A wound, or poison a river, are seen.

Ah! Well I know my tumultuous days now at their prime  
Will be brief as the bracken too in their stay  
Yet in them as the flowers of the hills 'mid the bracken  
All I treasure is needs hidden away  
And will also be dead  
When its rude cover is shed.

## HUGH MACDIARMID

## THE BORDERS

This is the land I love  
Whaur I was born and bred  
And I come back to it noo  
As a man micht come back frae the dead.

No' to escape frae life — to escape  
 Into a faur fuller and richer life  
 The Borders had when I was a lad  
 And ha'e still surpassin' rife.

There's nae wee stretch o' land on Earth  
— Nor only a hundred times its size  
'S gi'en birth to sic a routh o' sang,  
And prose, and great inventions likewise.

No' England, the United States, or the hail  
British Empire even at its apogee  
Has ha'en like Scotland at the yae time  
A Burns and a Scott to croon its poetry.

The glory o' the Borders has aye been  
Ilka noo and again doon the centuries  
The combustion o' the placid wi' the intense.  
Certes, *that* hasna ceased and downa cease!

The lang lines o' thae bleak hillsides  
Like whippets streekit oot in a race  
May gar an ignorant incomer speir  
What mair can come, as frae naewhaur, in sic  
a place?

But we ken it's no' folk wi' the deepest  
feelin's  
That show their emotions maist obviously.  
Sae here — the toom dales, nigh peopleless,  
Ha'e secrets hidden frae the mere e'e

A miracle o' sang can be made  
Oot o' a mouthfu' o' empty air.  
The Borders ken that's a miracle  
Every noo and again fund here.

The ballads o' Europe are ferlies in which  
Sangs and tales frae mony lands blend  
But whaur save in the Border ballads  
Dae the words tak' wing and to  
Heaven ascend?

The journalism o' their day thae ballads were  
About local feuds and forays and auld wives' tales  
Yet a' at aince they soar up frae doggerel  
To heichts that only sheer genius scales.

Wha doots the spirit o' the Borders lies here  
May weel ask why Yarrow's dowie glen  
Has inspired great poets in a way that maist  
O' the world's big rivers may ettle in vain.

The Volga, the Danube, the Thames,  
And Mississipi are mighty waterways.  
Beside them Yarrow's but a wee burn  
Yet ootrank them in its poets' lays.

Sae it's still frae the lanely places,  
No' the croodit centres o' mankind yet,  
The treasures o' human ingyne emerge  
And oor inspiration is aye relit.

What guid can come oot o' wee Nazareth?  
Fules sneer — and a' history replies.  
There's nae majority rule in this  
Ettrick Forest, or Ayr, no' London's the prize.

The hert o' mankind is naked here  
As naewhaur else and access gi'es  
To the haill range o' human passions,  
Joys, sorrows, triumphs, tragedies.

You meet them at ilka turn — there's no'  
A bend in the road that disna disclose  
A glimpse o' King Arthur yet, or the soond  
Some horn o' Elfland blows.

Flodden aye and mony anither field  
Whaur Borderers lie wha fell in auld wars,  
Yet this land o' Annie Lawrie and Kirkconnel's  
Fair Helen  
Still belongs mair to Venus than to Mars.

Yet tell me, gin you can  
Hoo peerless sangs cam' frae wee wars then  
But nane their equal frae the great World Wars  
That took faur sairer toll o' Border men.

Oh the Border scene's a wonderfu' drama  
Wi' endless variety and sudden changes.  
Look at the Esk, hoo saftly and sweetly  
Through its pastoral valley it ranges.

Look at it again — and realise  
Hoo a' at aince it roars doon in spate  
Whirlin' deid sheep and torn-up trees  
Heids-owre-gowdy in its heidlang gait.

Aye, quick as that is the Border temper  
And no' to meddle wi' lichtly.  
Ane o' the best o' the auld ballads  
Expresses the haill thing richtly.

"A' the bluid that's shed on Earth  
Rins thro' the springs o' this countrie."  
I wot that's been since the warld began  
And will to the warld's end be.

Sae a' the moods o' human nature  
Are seen in ilka Border lad and lass  
Ev'n as the quick clood shaddaws there  
On the lown hillsides pass and repass.

Look at the Forestry Commission's rich plantings  
And tell me if it isna true  
Mony a bonny tree here seems to grow  
Less here than in Heaven's ain venue.

While doon in the croodit valleys still  
The Border folk still gang their ways  
In the mills and streets o' their eident toons  
Ev'n as the Lindsays flew like fire in  
ancient days.

Here whaur the Romans were halted  
And the Angles thrawn oot  
The bulwark o' Scots independence  
Is still as pooerfu' and resolute.

The Border rins through the quick o' my hert  
And the herts o' a' my kind  
And as lang as ane o' us is alive  
We'll ha'e nae blurrin' o' that line.

Sae ev'n the cauld draps o' dew that hing  
 Hauf-melted on the beard o' the thistle this  
 February day  
 Hae something genial and refreshin' about them  
 And the sun, strugglin' airgh and wan i' the lift  
 Hauf-smooored in grey mist, seems nane the less  
 An emblem o' the guid cause.

It's like quality in weather affectin' a' thing  
But aye eludin' touch, sicht, and soond.  
Naething o' the Earth sinks deeper noo  
Aneth the canny surface o' the mind  
Than autumn leaves driftin' on a lochan.

Yet thinkin' o' Scotland syne's like lookin'  
 Into real deep water whaur the depth  
 Becomes sae great it seems to move and swell  
 Withoot the slightest ripple, yet somehow gi'es me  
 An unco sense o' the sun's stability  
 And fills me, slowly, wi' a new ardour and elasticity.

It's like having — hashish, is it?  
Huh? Nae mescaline quickens and expands the spirit  
As the quiet-see-min' Borders dae to folk  
Prood o' the glories they inherit and transmit.

Ask yoursel' why on the a'e side  
O' the Border line you've sic splendid traditions  
— And haurdly ocht on the ither side  
Shaped by nearly the same conditions.

The official frontier has whiles been changed.  
Frae the Mersey to the Humber it s'ud be.  
But the haill warld kens it hauds in twain  
Twa neighbour folk wha differ utterly.

And weel may it be remembered  
England's doon there but as true Tammas fund  
To the Nor' East the Borders slide into Fairyland.  
There's nae divide 'twixt Scottish and magic grund.

Sae woe to them wha'd shift oor landmarks.  
Tho' the Borders may be an imaginary line  
Yet it's a' the mair real for that, of course,  
And deeper than Ordnance Surveys divine.

The column atop Whita's hill marks the way  
Malcolm and Leyden yoked us wi' the East  
And Bruce and Mungo Park through Africa scored  
The Border line in a way Time's never erased.

Syne woe to ony comin' up frae the Sooth  
Wha dinna ken at aince when they come  
Frae England into Scotland tho' there's nocht to tell  
The ane frae t'ither — gin their ain herts are dumb.

O it's naething oot o' the common here  
If a barnyard hen to Heaven's yett  
Beats eagle or skylark and syne sings there  
A sang that has the nightingale's bett.

Here we can deny a'thegither  
The notion that value's on the side  
O' the big battalions, and ken a Dauvit yet  
Wi' a sling-shot can whummle ony giant's pride.

Sae come wi' me and we'll rove again  
To Ettrick Heid and doon Eskdalemuir  
Or into Liddesdale to Hermitage  
Whaur Bothwell's heart was stieve and dour.

Or dourer still at Ecclefechan feel  
The volcanic spirit o' Tammis Carlyle,  
Or through Sweetheart Abbey's shattered fanes  
Steep in Eternity's licht awhile.

Or in Dumfries at the Globe Inn mind  
A' the ardour and anguish o' Rabbie Burns,  
Or hoo Roger Quin frae his lodgin' winda  
By Devorgilla's Brig drew eels frae Nith's currents.

Look! Yon's ane o' the gairden wa's I climmed  
To fill my wame whiles wi' honey-blobs,  
No' carin' wha's gairden I riped providin'  
It belanged as it did to ane o' the nob's.

And there are the hills and moors  
I gathered the blaeberrys on  
And the ploughed fields whaur I used to look  
For Peesie's eggs in the days lang gone.

And a' the rivers, the Esk, the Ewes,  
The Wauchope, the Nith, I dooked in and fished,  
Guddled and girmed — the hert o' a loon  
Nae better playgr'und could ever ha'e wished.

And the wuds o' the Langfall and Kernigal  
Whaur we picked the hines and got oor conkers  
And dung the squirrels oot o' the trees  
In the happy days when we were youngers.

Aye, and later trysted oor lassies there  
And cut oor initials on muckle tree-boles,  
Cut them sae deep they maun still be seen  
No' to be grown oot while on Time rolls.



Whitadder, Teviot, Leader and Jed  
Wauchope, Kirtle and hundreds mair  
The names ring bot like a peel o' bells  
In jubilee or lamentations there.

O dinna fear the auld spirit's deid.  
Gang to Selkirk or Hawick or Langholm yet  
At Common-Riding time — like a tidal wave  
It boils up again, and carries a' afore it.

Or in the seven-a-side Rugby games  
Translated into terms o' skilfu' rivalry  
The keen combative spirit o' the Borderers still  
Races and chases as aince on Canonbie lea.

Able for ocht in War or Peace,  
At Work or Play, or in the Arts,  
The Borders bide as they've aye been  
— Ane o' human nature's favourite parts.

We dinna ken what horrors waur  
Than ony in history we yet maun face  
— But seein' yon atomic lums at Chapelcross  
Mortal concern, ev'n terror's, nae disgrace.

And yet, if the warst s'ud come to the warst  
I wadna pit it past  
The Borders to rise like a phoenix again  
Even frae sic a holocaust.

Note: this poem was commissioned by the B.B.C. and first transmitted, with an accompanying film, on B.B.C.—1, Scotland, on the 17th March, 1966.

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speir: ask	toom: empty	ferlies:	wonders	eident: busy
airgh:	lacking brightness	yett: gate	whummle: overturn	

## HUGH MACDIARMID

### CREDO FOR A CELTIC POET

*Au fait* with the whole range of European arts and letters  
As few have ever been, he proudly proclaimed himself  
A barbarian, in the sense that the art  
Of the Celtic lands and of Scandinavia  
Were both on the edge of the world  
Wherein classical art progressed  
Through Carolingian, Ottonian, Italian, and Byzantine phases,  
And neither was strong enough  
To stand aside from the main stream of European art.  
They aped it, and, whenever they did,  
They fell from grace, as is the way with barbarian art.

Lowland Scotland is a battle-ground  
Between Europe and Gaeldom, and the work  
Of European civilization in this "march"  
—As in England and Russia—  
Has always had to be pursued  
Under hard conditions and given  
Unstable and precarious results.

He discussed this a great deal  
With his friend Eugenio d'Ors,  
The Catalan writer (of Catalan and Cuban descent)  
And successor of Prat de la Riba in the great work  
Of intellectual and political renovation,  
Initiated by that industrious and particularist race.

Later, d'Ors dissociated himself from Catalanism  
And thereafter wrote only in Castilian,  
But it was Catalonia in the first place  
That inspired him with the intellectual concepts  
Out of which he built his Europeanism,  
By a movement inverse to that  
Which led Barres from the contemplation of the world  
To practical and self-centred Lorraine.



Never disturbing the depths of my individuality."  
 He claimed to stand outside both  
 In a distinct world altogether,  
 The separate and sovereign world of Gaeldom;  
 But if there are three Europes on the political map  
 — A communist Europe, with a hold  
 On Europe and a hold on Asia,  
 Whose centre is Moscow and whose prophet is Karl Marx,  
 A liberal and parliamentary Europe  
 Whose prophet, Rousseau, may be French  
 But whose centre is "the English tradition",  
 And, finally, a federative, corporative Europe  
 Whose centre is Rome, not necessarily  
 In the religious Catholic sense,  
 But certainly in the culturally oecumenical sense;  
 Not necessarily in the politically Fascist sense  
 But certainly in the sense that the problem  
 Of the twentieth century is not freedom but cultural authority,  
 A Europe whose prophet is Proudhon,  
 His sympathies were wholly with the first of these,  
 Which, alone, he knew, had anything of value  
 To say to Gaeldom, and under which alone  
 Gaelic independence and the Gaelic languages  
 Would be respected and encouraged,  
 A view in which alone the disastrous split  
 Between Highlander and Lowlander might be healed,  
 And a United Scotland arise in the world  
 — A view in which also the unnatural  
 Symbiosis of Gael and Gall might be severed  
 And Gaeldom detach itself from the sub-fusc Sassenachs  
 As the golden moon swings free from a cloud again.

The reason was that he rose  
 Out of the category of men  
 And entered the category of the elements.  
 He was the wind, the sea, the tempest, the hurricane.  
 He was the marvellous embodiment  
 Of the complete identification  
 Of the Celtic mind with all nature and all life  
 That before this emergence had been long  
 Totally beyond the comprehension  
 Of the vast majority of modern Gaels,  
 Who had been in full retreat for over a century,  
 Fearing reality, passion, tragedy, communal assertion,

Fearing even the imputation of sadness  
And blind and deaf to the things of the mind  
And the intricate high arts of their ancestors;  
In love with graceful and melodious ghosts,  
Dancing to their own shadows  
On the edge of the Imperial scheme of things,  
From which they were being pushed off  
— He changed all that.

For the real Gael has something which the old Greeks had,  
Which the French had in great measure,  
Which the Swedes have acquired,  
Which even the English have possessed now and then  
— He has an ideal, a plan of life,  
Transcending the mere means and apparatus of living.  
Feverish immersion in secondary and ancillary matters  
Leaves him unsatisfied  
He has a craving for essentials.  
The miracle of literature,  
Of culture, in racial history,  
Is that it is at once the bow and the mark,  
The inspiration and the aim.  
'In the beginning was the Word',  
But the Word is also  
'The last of life for which the first was made',  
The seed and the flower are one.  
The Gaels are among the peoples  
Who have always taken that mystery for granted.  
But in Scotland under the blight  
Of the English influence  
They have grown blind  
Or indifferent to it.  
The Celts with all their follies, weakness and savageries  
Never fell into that cardinal blunder  
Of mistaking means for ends,  
The ends they pursued, often blindly and wildly,  
Were the fostering of individual dignity,  
And of the spiritual imagination.  
And the maintaining of a spiritual, orchestral harmony  
Between man and the universe.  
His mission — his triumph — was to redirect  
The vast dynamic and mechanism of modern life  
To such aims again.

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## TOM SCOTT

### LAMENT FOR THE GREAT MUSIC

MacDiarmid published this poem of some 600 lines in *Stony Limits* (1934). It is in the lingua franca, not Scots, and together with the title poem of homage to that great epic poet C. M. Doughty, is his highest achievement in Sudron at least up to that time. His conception of the Scottish literary revival was then undergoing a sea-change from a purely national revival of Scots, in which he had already published three volumes which were the best work in Scots since the sixteenth century, to a pan-Celtic vision rooted in Gaelic. The problem of a Gaelic poet is different from that of a Scots poet: the Scots poet writes in both Scots and English and/or an amalgam of the two, whereas the Gaelic poet must choose between Gaelic and a translator's English or Scots. This shift to a pan-Celtic European vision influenced Grieve's return to a form of the Sudron tongue, which he has chiefly (but by no means entirely) used ever since with varying degrees of success and failure, but rarely with the tact and assured mastery of his poems in Scots. He has little native Gaelic to use.

The term "Great Music" is a translation of the Gaelic *Ceol Mor* as applied to the pibroch music of the MacCrimmons, those traditional pipers to the clan MacLeod of Skye. They flourished in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, creating in the pibroch one of the greatest achievements of all music, comparable to the preludes and fugues of Bach, and the most original contribution Scotland has made to European art of any sort. The mood of the poem is of heroic elegy, not only for the lost glory of the pibroch, but the high Celtic culture of which it was the culminating (apparently) expression—itsself a mighty lament for a race oppressed and threatened with total extinction. The pibroch is of sonata or concerto length, of great classical dignity and simplicity of theme, yet moving through its succeeding variations to an almost incredible intricacy and complexity—and the mood of heroic elegy is its own most characteristic one. No other music known to me can match it for dignity and noble pathos, and it is astonishing that a Celto-Teutonic people (and all the British are more or less that, the Celtic strain dominant here, the Teutonic there) should be so unaware of the musical treasure created in these islands and held here by a few in trust for the human race.

MacDiarmid in his lament for a lament is here discovering the deepest historic roots of his own psyche, and is inspired by the majesty and pathos of the fate of aristocratic Gaeldom to a classical verse which has never been equalled, let alone surpassed, since Milton, in these islands. This is evident even in the quiet opening lines:—

Fold of value in the world west from Greece,  
Over whom it has been our duty to keep guard,  
Have we slept on our watch; have death and dishonour  
Reached you through our neglect and left you in lasting sleep?

Here already he has struck the theme he has been searching for in certain previous works, the theme which will allow him to explore the Celtic roots of Scotland. This theme became dominant in *Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930), where he speaks of a European Fourfold Idea pillaring up European culture—the Teutonic Idea of the North, the Classical Idea of the Mediterranean South, the Russian Idea of the East, and the Celtic Idea of the West. In that poem he found no “objective correlative” for his intuitive apprehension of the Celtic Idea, but here, in the *Ceol Mor*, he strikes it. It is significant, not only for Scotland but for Europe, that when he finds it, the mood is elegiac.

The *Ceol Mor* is at once reality and symbol, as the Thistle was to him. As I see it, the movement of European poetry leads up to the allegorical form dominant in the Middle Ages; and when that breaks up, takes the twin lines of realism and symbolism; and in the twentieth century (beginning earlier, probably with Goethe), the realist and symbolist lines re-integrate into a new polysemous art in which, instead of the abstract theology (or theory) of allegory proper, reality itself in the historical and scientific senses, becomes the adequate “symbol” or allegorical term of a new vision. I call this new art, to which all modern art is moving, “Polysemous Veritism”, to distinguish it from Dante’s “Polysemous Allegory”. I have no scope here to develop this view, but MacDiarmid’s work, like that of Pound, Joyce and many others, is a major contribution. Through the reality-symbol of the *Ceol Mor* he breaks through into the real Celtic world as Yeats never did. The ancient world comes alive to him, and this is at once manifested in the intensity of his rhythms—urgent, vibrant, strong, of classical nobility and dignity, like the Great Music itself. The heroic ghosts of the Celtic world rise to meet him, shadowy though they still are, and with them

the Celtic Church, the Nynian-Columban root of Scottish Christianity, and the awareness of that extraordinary culture, compounded of heroism and an almost tender delicacy of feeling, which the Teutonic has never yet caught up with. Shakespeare comes near it, being himself the greatest product of the Celto-Teutonic blend (The Tempest is an almost purely Celtic poem, with Prospero an Arch-Druid) yet born.

As always when the Muse is ardently responsive, MacDiarmid plunges deep into thought, argument, discussion, proliferation of *aperçus* and concepts, rugging at problems others have scarcely thought of: he is on chatting terms with the perennial mysteries, the eternal questions. In fact, he is a natural theologian (i.e. a student of reality), and it is because of this that he has poured intense scorn on an orthodox religion that has lost all its inspiration (or murdered it) and is no longer anything but empty, alienated form, far-strayed from its own Christ.

But his chief concern, as always, is with Scotland, and it is to Scotland he returns again and again:—

These things will pass. "The world will come to an end  
But love and music will last for ever."  
Sumeria is buried in the desert sands,  
Atlantis in the ocean waves—happier these  
Than Scotland, for all is gone, no travesty  
Of their ancient glory lives  
On the lips of degenerate sons as here.  
This is what is hard to bear; the decivilised have every grace  
As the antecedents of their vulgarities ...

We who are strong think only in terms  
Of classes and masses, in terms of mankind.  
We have no use for the great music.  
All we need is a few good-going tunes.

The passion of utterance here is unmistakable, and is the one element missing, at this pitch of intensity, in most of the other poems in this volume (*Stony Limits*).

He can hear the great pibroch of the MacCrimmons in his ear as he writes, and the fire burns in him:—

The bagpipes commit to the winds of heaven  
The deepest emotions of the Scotsman's heart  
In joy and sorrow, in war and peace.

He speaks of two of the greatest pibrochs, *The Lament for the Children* and *I gave a kiss to the King's hand*, marvelling at what he considers the triviality of the occasion that gave rise to the magnificence of the latter: and he tells a story of the quality of these pipers. The pipers of Lord Louis Gordon refused to play for him because, after the battle of Inverurie in 1745, Gordon held the great piper Duncan Ban MacCrimmon prisoner of war. What other army, then or since, has had such men? These "barbarian" Gaels knew, as MacDiarmid puts it,

That Kings and Generals are only shadows of time,  
But time has no dominion over genius.

Their tribute of silence to a piper of genius is one of the most striking cultural gestures I have ever heard of. What indeed was the whole misconceived Rising of 1745, the right rebellion in the wrong cause of the obsolete Stewarts, what was war itself, compared to the genius of Duncan Ban? These men knew the meaning of reverence for art.

The poet goes on to muse on the impermanence of temporal things:—

Yet the waves will not wash the feet  
Of MacLeod's Maidens for ever, and all modern Science  
May vanish from human memory as the great days  
Of Assyria and Egypt and Rome...

The State has its roots in time. It will culminate in time.  
Greater things than this will fall...

Even the great *a priori* principles may not be as eternal as they seem—who can guarantee that two and two may not make five in some other planet? They too may be wearable as the Skye rocks (MacLeod's Maidens) mentioned above. His musing leads on, as always, to language, and he meditates on the "language where language ends", saying it reminds him of a sunset he once saw in a highland place "When the tide-forsaken river was a winding ribbon of ebony" and a great light suddenly lit up the foreground... and he had the sense of a man returning from foreign scenes to the place of his birth.

So his thought runs on, typically seeming to range away from the central theme, like a setter chasing up many cross-scents, yet still coming back always to the main one. For him this is not only the great music, the *Ceol Mor*, but the Celtic root

it stems from: and he asks whether the apparent decay of Celtic civilization is not just a shedding of dead leaves to prepare for a coming spring. To this root he grips in the darkness, and in a swift appraisal of his own situation as the one great Scottish poet in two centuries, he speaks of his bafflement at the lack of comprehension in his own countrymen, which estranges him from them and from himself:—

And waken to its (Scotland's) realities as baffled Samson woke  
Shorn and tethered. My native land should be to me  
As a root to a tree. If a man's labour fills no want there,  
His deeds are doomed and his music mute.  
This Scotland is not Scotland...

There is the crux—the Scotland of to-day is no longer Scotland, but a philistine travesty of itself. It is Scotshire, a county in the north of England, an ex-country, an Esau land that has sold its birthright for a mess of English pottage. The Scotland of to-day would be a foreign land to the MacCrimmons. He, as poet, presents the Scottish people with their own image, the thing they have become, and he calls them back, like a true bard, to their own heritage. But so lost they are that they do not recognize it, or him. This is the measure of how deep the rot has gone since 1707.

At this point the note of elegy, the lament for the great music, modulates into an elegy for the whole of Scotland, the "broken image of the lost kingdom" (it is Edwin Muir's phrase) that every Scot carries deep in his soul. But it is not only the lost kingdom that concerns MacDiarmid—he knows there is no way back to outmoded states—but with the lost freedom to create new forms of society and art. The great Scottish Idea, the one that Scotland gave to the world out of the agony of the Wars of Independence, is Freedom—the "nobill thing" of Barbour's famous outburst in *The Brus*. This is the *sine qua non* of existence, whether of nations or persons, and the tragic irony of Scotland is that she, who gave birth to the idea of national independence and integrity out of the abstract ruling-class gangsterdom which was feudalism, owning allegiance to no country and no people but itself, should almost alone of European nations have betrayed and lost this freedom to live and change. Truly, such a Scotland is not Scotland: it is only a corpse breeding and spreading corruption.

He goes on to brood on what the MacCrimmons would think of our modern cities "swollen huge with thoughts not

thought, that should have been thought", and with songs unsung,  
with

Tears unshed for ever and deeds undone beyond achievement  
now?

These denationalised Scots have killed the soul  
Which is universally human; they are men without souls;  
All the more heavily the judgement falls upon them  
Since it is a universal law of life they have sinned against.

There, surely, is the answer to the particular kind of "trahison des clercs" found in those Anglo-Scots intellectuals who bleat of a false antithesis, "internationalism, not nationalism" —as if it were possible to have the one without the other. They sin against the universal law of life which invests life in individuals, not conglomerations—yes, even in the ant-hill. In the place of living, separate identities having mostly their differences in common, these ghouls would reduce all to a horrible "international", characterless, abstract fog, a devitalised non-entity. That phoney distortion of Marxism was given the lie long since and utterly by Tito. But their "international" equals "English", and behind the pseudo-internationalism of the Anglo-Scots lurks the face of the Auld Enemy—English imperialism.

His thought runs on round these "eternal embers" of Scottish culture, and he says he feels he knows the pibroch music best when

Away here I hold a glass of water between me and the sun  
And can only tell the one from the other by the lintwhite  
quiver,

The trembling of the water...

That remarkable image of a real observation (compare Dunbar's description of the water in the fourth stanza of *The Goldyn Targe*) is typical "polysemous veritism" —the image being the exact symbol, the real cohering with the apparent in vibrant meaning. This image of light is, at one level, the Great Music itself (and the greater music of reality beyond it); but radiating out from that actuality and reference, he sees the whole spirit of man as sunlike:—

Our spirit is of a being indestructible...

It is like the sun which seems to set to our earthly eyes  
But in reality shines on unceasingly...

Thus—and it is typical of the man—in the very moment of deepest lamentation, instead of regret, he re-affirms the indestructibleness of the spirit, and the mood of elegy gives way to heroic affirmation.

In this mood he meditates on the source of this mighty spirit, and decides “it is not lawful” to probe its sources (an unusual law-abidingness in him), as if it were a thing subject to space and time. We must wait and watch for it to reveal itself to us, as the eye

Waits patiently for the rising sun, the mind creates only  
to destroy;  
Amid the desolation language rises, and towers  
Above the ruins ...

And in the same way the music rises, its relations with itself rather than anything external. He reflects on the nature of pibroch and its relations to other musical forms; and the stupid neglect of pibroch leads back to himself:—

I am as lonely and unfrequented as your music is.  
I have had to get rid of my friends...  
If one's capital consists in a calling  
And a mission in life, one cannot afford to keep friends.  
I could not stand undivided and true amongst them.

This is an extraordinary passage, and only those who know the weight of sheer negation the unusual individual has to try to bear up under, will understand it. “Hell is other people” for the man of vision. Only those who conform are welcome in a group: the non-conformist, the man who bears the burden of the mystery, can only be smothered by its smug defensiveness. His solitude is a tragic and heroic fate which must be borne for the ultimate good of the race. Thus a Rilke is quite right in saying that a poet must love his loneliness and celebrate it with harmonious lamentations—and MacDiarmid was one of the earliest paraphrasers of Rilke.

The happiest of such solitaries are those who are “companioned by a future”, foreseeing the struggle of a nation into consciousness of its existence, and who sing out of that consciousness, animated and restrained by a mystical sense of the high destiny of a nation. Such are not swallowed up by the



petty cares of individual being. But is MacDiarmid one such? He thinks not:—

But I am companioned by an irrecoverable past,  
By a mystical sense of such a destiny foregone...  
Time out of mind... Oh, Alba, my son, my son!

The adaptation of David's incomparable cry over Absalom is startling and revealing. Alba, the ancient Scotland, is seen by this twentieth century poet as an Absalom son for whom he would gladly die. What kind of poet can utter such a cry? The answer is as direct as genius—a bard, a *fili*, a poet in the great Celtic tradition too long dormant and decayed, but at last showing signs of stirring among the scunnersome poeticules of our benighted age. Here MacDiarmid speaks with the eternal voice of the bard of his people, to whom all time is but a thought rooted in the mind of eternity. This is the voice of the keeper of the nation's conscience and traditions, the guardian of the welfare of the race. This is not the voice of C. M. Grieve speaking, but the timeless voice of Scottish poetry itself speaking immortally through him.

Yet even in this moment of realising his national identity, he looks beyond his own nation, out of his own nation, to the fraternal nations around him: for when one has found and is sure of one's own identity, both personal and national, the gaze no longer looks inward to the lost self but outward to the other selves. Thus in finding his national identity, the poet finds, as part of that identity, the between-nations, the inter-national, and affirms both as aspects of each other. For through national sovereignty alone a people can come to full maturity and international responsibility. This is what our Anglo-Scots intellectuals, their bright heads darkened by their benighted souls, can never understand. Through self-realisation one comes to realise others:—

Not to one country or race, but to humanity,  
Not to this age but to all time,  
As your pibrochs reach to eternity...

The poem goes on for pages after that, but there, at its highest illumination, I must leave it. It is a very great poem indeed, one of his best, and the best heroic elegy written by a Scot in the lingua franca—a major work.



## JOHN MONTAGUE

### THE SEAMLESS GARMENT AND THE MUSE

"I turn from the poetry of beauty to the poetry of wisdom."  
"Direadh"

Sooner or later, if one continues to write poetry, the desire grows to write a long poem or sequence, something more expansive than the lyric to which anthologies have reduced English poetry, something which is co-terminous with at least one whole aspect of one's experience. It is this latter aspect of modern poetry which is particularly irritating; that while novelists have ransacked the details of twentieth century life (it is to *Ulysses*, not the *Wasteland*, or even *Paterson*, we must go for a contemporary equivalent of the "felt life" in *The Canterbury Tales*) poets have limited themselves, like the castrati of the Papal choir, to certain complex, asocial tones. The best relationship most of them can manage with society is chiding, chiliastic; in detecting a dissocialisation of sensibility within the English tradition, Eliot may have provided an excuse, as well as an explanation, for the partial absence of many twentieth century poets from their poems.

MacDiarmid had never recognised this kind of absentee landlordism of the spirit: one of the aspects of his achievement worth stressing is the way he has got most of himself onto the page even preoccupations one may dislike. The contemplative centre we value so much in Eliot and Edwin Muir is there, but also the coarser activity, the sparks from the rim of the wheel. Pride, humour, contrariness; patriotism, hatred, nostalgia; love, lust, longing: there is no contemporary poem more varied in mood than *The Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. And since there is no achievement without an accompanying technique, the poem is a showpiece of MacDiarmid's early virtuosity, like *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, another poem in which a poet examines the civilisation he is involved with. Whether this diversity of mood and skill in the early poems gets dissolved in the later, is the central problem of MacDiarmid's career, as well as of Pound's; but I will come back to that in a moment.

I mentioned Chaucer, and it is clearly from medieval Scottish poetry that MacDiarmid inherits his ability to move from lyric to flying, as well as his grasp of physical reality. In this, he is more lucky than William Carlos Williams, in whose letters we can

trace a baffled resentment at that theory of modern poetics which would deny validity to the ordinary details of twentieth century life. There is a careful recording of a pub scene in *The Waste Land*, but *The Drunk Man*, like the Night-town sequence in *Ulysses*, is written by someone for whom it is a natural backdrop. Does this adherence to a national tradition exclude MacDiarmid from the main concerns of contemporary poetry? From Anglo-American, perhaps, but his answer surely would be that he rejoins contemporary literature at a wider point on the arc, with the semi-public racially conscious poetry of writers, like Lorca and Pablo Neruda.

If the early poetry derives from a willed rediscovery of what the schoolbooks used condescendingly to call the Scottish Chaucerians (I may seem to be riding the point but some recent reviews indicate that English critics are still not prepared to pay MacDiarmid the simple courtesy of recognising the tradition he is working in) the best of his middle poetry often springs from his fascination with the maimed Celtic tradition, I am thinking of poems like "Island Funeral", "Direadh" and above all, "Lament for the Great Music":

Fold of value in the world west from Greece  
Over whom it has been our duty to keep guard  
Have we slept on our watch; have death and dishonour  
Reached you through our neglect and left you in lasting sleep?

That these lines are clogged from Eoin MacNeill's translation\* of Grainne's lullaby over Diarmid in the *Duanaire Finn* seems to me finally irrelevant: MacDiarmid transposes them so that they become a lament, not over a boy, but the civilisation to which he belonged, the original tradition, may it be said, of these islands. And the whole movement of the lines is changed to match the theme so that an almost naive cry of tenderness is keyed to a Whitmanian skirl.

That MacDiarmid, with only a smattering of the language, has made the best translations from Scots Gaelic, is another phenomenon which links him with Pound. How much of the tradition does he manage to recreate in his own work? In the shorter poems of place, the deserted glens and cliffs whose names are the only Gaelic words current in daily speech, he can echo

---

\* O fold of valor of the world west from Greece, / over whom  
I stay watching, / my heart will well-nigh burst / if I see thee not  
at any time.

Duncan Ban MacIntyre's "in Praise of Ben Dorain", but with a savager note that testifies to his sense of distance from the older poetry's ease with nature (a common note, indeed, in all the Celtic literatures, except perhaps Welsh: early Irish poetry being so full of it that it cannot be compared with anything in English but with Chinese or Japanese poetry, with the quatrain to match the *haiku*).

The North Face of Liathach  
Lives in the mind like a vision.  
From the deeps of Coire ne Caime  
Sheer cliffs go up  
To spurs and pinnacles and jagged teeth.  
Its grandeur draws back the heart.

It is this sense of isolation, loss, loneliness, that dominates (since MacDiarmid is an honest man and not an official of the Gaelic League) the longer poems: "Lost world of Gaeldom, futher and further away from me / How can I follow, Albannach, how reachieve /the unsearchable masterpiece?" There are passages in "Lament for the Great Music" which reach the keening intensity of "MacCrimmon's Lament", as sung by Jeannie Robertson, or that other death-cry of a civilisation, Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch's mourning of Llywelyn, the last independent Welsh prince.

The heart gone chill, under a rib-cage of fear,  
Lust shrivelled to dried twigs . . .  
See the oaktrees lash, the sea sting the land . . .  
Woe for my lord, unblemished falcon,  
Woe for the calamity that brought him down!

But the current of sympathy fails, and MacDiarmid's imaginative strength is overcome by the triviality of contemporary life in Scotland, "the ultimate Incoherence." And why not, when most of the things he speaks of, like the affinity between the *Ceol Mor* and the Indian *ragas*, and therefore the Celtic sense of form, the snake swallowing its tail in the margin of the Book of Kells (or *Finnegans Wake*) with Oriental art, must seem outlandish to even most poetry readers? One of the troubles here is that the Celtic literatures are still the preserve of scholars obscuring "the texts with philology", so that we have the curious

compensating incongruity of poets being more familiar with the culture of the Pueblo Indians and the poetry of Basho and Li-Po than with that which most resembles them in their own countries. But a tradition which can still, at a considerable historical remove, nourish the poetry of writers like MacDiarmid, Austin Clarke, David Jones and even, in some aspects of his work, Mr. Robert Graves, is surely worth closer examination, especially now that the Kulturkampf of the Celtic Twilight can be replaced by the more exact testimony of archaeologists and textual editors.

One has to admit that MacDiarmid adds to the confusion of values in this area himself by his euphorically boundless claims for "the Celtic Muse". Thus his craftsman's instinct leads him to translate the eighteenth century Voyage poem, "The Birlinnn of Clanranald" partly into the metre and mood of the Border Ballads, but when he comes to praise the author he asks that he might inherit his "dowless spirit, / That balks at nought" ("To Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair") and then speaks of him as a great / Gael, who, like God (sic)

... sees Life  
As in yon mighty passage in  
The Bhagavad-Gita where  
A' Nature casts its ooter skin ...

Dauntlessness may be regarded as a quality in some Gaelic poetry, just as in Dunbar and Henryson, but whatever mysticism there is cannot be separated from a shining burden of natural detail. And here we return to the central question of MacDiarmid's career: any attempt to concentrate on an aspect of his work tends to be dissipated by "the seamless garment" of his vision, especially in the later poems. Thus *A Drunk Man* sweeps up all the lyrics and doric-ised reading of a particular period, but the first section of *In Memoriam James Joyce* leans back to incorporate stanzas from "In a Caledonian Forest" (*Stony Limits*) and "In the Shetland Islands" (*The Islands of Scotland*), 1934 and 1937 respectively.

This is the kind of thing which annoys critics bloodhounding for development, though it may well be the clue they are looking for. The primary reason for the change, acknowledged by the poet himself, seems to have been a mystical intuition of the universe as a unity of energies. This was always latent in MacDiarmid, whose early books combine poems of marvellously coarse farmyard detail, like "In Mysic's Bed", with glimpses of interstellar space where

The moonbeams kilter i' the lift  
An' Earth, the bare auld stane,  
Glitters beneath the seas o' Space,  
White as a mammoth's bane.

("Au Clair de la Lune")

But when he attempts an explicit statement, as in "Moment of Eternity", which actually *opens* the *Collected Poems*, the language is too conventional to convince us that he has experienced Ygdrasil rather than a Shelleyan dream:

I was a multitude of leaves  
Receiving and reflecting light...

Nor does he come closer in *The Drunk Man* where the visions of eternity are so locally tethered that he can use "the mighty thistle in wha's boonds I rove" to mock the ending of the *Divina Commedia*, the one real failure of taste in MacDiarmid's masterpiece.

It was at some point afterwards, probably during his lonely sojourn in the Shetlands, that his sense of the endless pattern of the universe became overpowering. It can be expressed in political terms

I have caught a glimpse of the seamless garment  
And am blind to all else for evermore.  
The immaculate vesture, the innermost shift,  
Of high and low, of rich and poor ...  
("In the Slums of Glasgow")

as well as in the geological accumulation which is the recurrent symbol in *Stony Limits*

... We are so easily baffled by appearances;  
And do not realise that these stones are one with the stars.

It can even, as we have seen, take over The Celtic muse

Your pibrochs that are like the glimpses  
Of reality transcending all reason  
Every supreme thinker has, and spends the rest of his life  
Trying to express in terms of reason.

Compared with "Little Gidding", however, this is a bald claim to visionary experience, and not its expression. Seamless garment or water of life, there is a force in MacDiarmid's later work which often dissipates the contrast and detail upon which, line by line, poetry must depend. And here perhaps one should enter the dangerous but necessary ground of poetic psychology; for the Universe of Light, the poetic equivalent of the Burning Bush seen by Moses in the Old Testament, is only one of the two primary poetic experiences. There is also the Muse, who, even through the medium of someone else's translation doctored into doric, dominates the variety of *A Drunk Man*:

I ha'e forkent ye! O I ha'e forkent.  
The years forecast your face afore they went.  
A licht I canna thole is in the lift.  
I bide in silence your slow-comin' pace.  
The ends o' space are bricht...

She had appeared even earlier in the already quoted sequence "Au Clair de la Lune", where he sees the huntress crossing the skies

Oot owre the thunner-wa'  
She haiks her shinin' breists,  
While th' ocean to her heels  
Slink in like bidden beasts.

and speaks of himself as "moonstruck"

She's seen me—she's seen me—and straucht  
Loupit clean on the quick o' my hert.  
The quhither o' cauld gowd's fairly  
Gi'en me stert.

An' the roarin' o' oceans noo'  
Is peerieweerie to me:  
Thunner's a tinklin' bell: an' Time  
Whuds like a flee.

This last stanza may seem akin to the later poetry, but there is less monotony in the metre, and more energy, even humour, in the images. But these are qualities to which the later poetry only rarely aspires; what I want to define here is a change of

allegiances which removed MacDiarmid's poetry from the realm of the personal. That it was conscious one can hardly doubt since in his essay on Ezra Pound ("*The Company I've Kept*") he goes out of his way to praise the Cantos (mistakenly I think) for ignoring the pre-scientific occult tradition of poetry.

But the Muse is entitled to her revenge, and she refuses to wear a seamless garment, or else she loses her female shape; the reference to the great Irish poet Aodhagan O Rathaille's Aisling or vision poem "Gile na Gile" in *In Memoriam James Joyce* is tepid, compared to the original:

Brightness of Brightness, I met on the way in loneliness,  
Crystal of Crystals, in her grey-flecked eye;  
Sweetness of Sweetness, in a voice without complaining,  
Red and white blended in her bright cheek's dye.

The combination of grotesquerie and tenderness which marks a poem like "The Tragic Tryst" ("It's a queer thing to tryst wi' a wumman / When the boss o' her body's gane") or the comic extravagance which sees the Thistle loup'ing out, "rootless and radiant" into the infinite, like a Doric space-craft (both from *The Drunk Man*), seem gone from *In Memoriam James Joyce*, to be replaced by, at its best, a cerebral intensity, at its worst, a cataloguing insistence which recalls neither Gaelic nor Scots, but the tradition of compulsive Scottish pedantry. Then, abruptly, the rollcall stops, and we have one of these arias which, as in *The Pisan Cantos*, restore one's faith in the whole enterprise.

So I think of you, Joyce, and of Yeats and others who are dead  
As I walk this Autumn and observe  
The birch tremulously pendulous in jewels of cairngorm,  
The sauch, the osier, and the crack-willow  
Of the beaten gold of Australia;  
The sycamore in rich straw-gold;  
The elm bowered in saffron;  
The oak in flecks of salmon gold:  
The beeches huge torches of living orange.

I keep coming back to Pound but the difference between this passage, surely, and



but old William was right in contending  
that the crumbling of a fine house  
profits no one  
(Celtic or otherwise)  
nor under Gesell would it happen

As Mabel's red head was a fine sight  
worthy his minstrelsy  
a tongue to the sea-cliffs or "Sligo in Heaven"

is also technical: Pound's method of association, suppressing the connecting links so as to convey all through the juxtaposition of images enables him to retain the variety of mood in his early poems. Superficially he and MacDiarmid are ambitious and obsessed in the same polyglot way, with the difference that while it is a measure of Pound's commitment that (except for the translations) he has not written any shorter poems since beginning "that great forty year epic", *The Cantos*, MacDiarmid's procedure tends to be the reverse; everything he writes after a certain point in his career can be assembled into larger units like *In Memoriam James Joyce* but may first exist as a separate poem.

Certainly he has been for many years the most interesting of what John Berryman once described to me as "the outriders" in contemporary poetry, the only one who has sought to reconcile defiant adoption of a local or special tradition with the international claims of modern poetry. When I first discovered *Stony Limits* in the darker shelves of a Dublin library I was dazzled by its variety and energy, and although I think Austin Clarke has transferred more of the skills of Gaelic poetry into English, and that MacDiarmid's later poetry might be more successful if he had learnt, like David Jones, to break the line for emphasis, his *Collected Poems* makes most contemporary work seem thin-blooded. His aggressive masculine pose may seem inimical to sincerity, but it is close to the concept of *duende* in Lorca's essay or to Wyndham Lewis's famous prescription for modern poetry: one knows that it is a man singing, and not a bird.



## WILLIAM COOKSON

### SOME NOTES ON HUGH MACDIARMID

Hugh MacDiarmid's work has always been rooted in locality; it is as local as the poetry of Wordsworth or Basil Bunting, both in language and in its sense of place, and, because of this, the intelligence that informs it is international in the best sense. While fighting the stupidity of parochialism throughout his life, he has always realized that true internationalism grows out of, and is indissolubly part of nationalism. It is consequently essential that his work is seen in a native, and European setting and not as an appendage to English poetry whose tradition is at least partially alien to that Scotland. Two recent books, *The Oxford Book of Scottish Verse* (45/-), edited by John MacQueen and Tom Scott and the revised World's Classics' *A Book of Scottish Verse* (O.U.P., 15/-), except that neither contains any Gaelic work, either original or translated, provide a useful introduction to the extent of the Scottish tradition.

Doubts are still expressed from time to time, South of the Border, about the value of MacDiarmid's restoration of Scots as a language for poetry, despite the fact that most of his finest work is written in it. I believe that T.S. Eliot effectively answered these criticisms from the point of view both of the English and the Scottish traditions when he wrote: "While I must admit that Lallans is a language which I read with difficulty and the subtleties of which I will never master, I can nevertheless enjoy it, and I am convinced that many things can be said, in poetry, in that language that cannot be expressed at all in English. I think that Scots poetry is, like that of other Western European languages, a potentially fertilising influence upon English poetry, and that it is in the interests of English poetry that Scots poetry should flourish. It is uncontested and now everywhere recognised that Hugh MacDiarmid's refusal to become merely another successful English poet, and his pursuing a course which at first some of his admirers deplored and some of his detractors derided, has had important consequences and has justified itself. It will eventually be admitted that he has done also more for English poetry by committing some of his finest verse to Scots, than if he had elected to write exclusively in the Southern dialect."

It is only necessary to imagine trying to translate *The Water-*

gaw into English to realize both the truth of what Eliot wrote, and the nature of MacDiarmid's art at its best. This poem is short enough to give in full.

Ae weet forenicht i' the yow-trummle<sup>1</sup>  
I saw yon antrin<sup>2</sup> thing  
A watergaw<sup>3</sup> wi its chitterin' licht  
Ayont the on-ding<sup>4</sup>;  
An' I thoct o' the last wild look ye gied  
Afore ye dee'd!

There was nae reek i' the laverock's hoose<sup>5</sup>  
That nicht — an' nane i' mine.  
But I hae thoct o' that foolish licht  
Ever sin syne;  
An' I think that mebbe at last I ken  
What your look meant then.

The Scots lyrics have a delicacy, gentleness and purity that eludes analysis, finer than anything he could have achieved if he had written them in English. They apply "to the universe", as Iain Crichton Smith says, "a parochial language which seems to make it familiar and loved." The words have many layers of meaning which open vistas in the mind. Always there is, to quote Keats, a "feeling for light and shade", of affirmation despite the dark, and I think especially here both of *The Watergaw* and of the incomparable *Empty Vessel* that is also sufficiently short to quote entire:

I met ayont the cairney  
A lass wi' tousie hair  
Singin' to a bairnie  
That was nae langer there.

Wunds wi warlds to swing  
Dinna sing sae sweet,  
The licht that bends owre a' thing  
Is less ta'en up wi't.

MacDiarmid followed these poems by writing a lyric sequence, which is probably his finest long poem, in 1925. *A Drunk Man*

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<sup>1</sup> ewe tremble, i.e. the cold weather that comes in July when the sheep are sheared.

<sup>2</sup> odd      <sup>3</sup> an indistinct rainbow.      <sup>4</sup> downpour.

<sup>5</sup> it was a dark and stormy night (reek-smoke; laverock-lark).

*Looks at the Thistle* is one of the very few works of modern literature that never tire. There is a huge pressure of tragic emotion behind the words of "private experience at its greatest intensity becoming universal", to use a phrase of T.S. Eliot, set against a background of the night, the elements, and the dereliction of Scotland in the twentieth century.

Nae man can ken his hert until  
The tide o' life uncovers it,  
And horror-struck he sees a pit  
Returnin' life can never fill!

Most of the early Scots lyrics are included in the misnamed *Collected Poems* now re-issued by Collier-Macmillan at 53/-. This "revised" edition is well printed with a useful enlarged glossary prepared by John C. Weston, but it is a pity that more extensive changes, both of contents and presentation, were not made. The editor admits that it was an error to split up *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* into separate sections each provided with a distracting, sometimes cheapening, title. For example, the magical adaptation of Alexander Blok's *The Stranger*, which is probably the finest translation of a Russian poem this century has produced, is here called "Poet's Pub". I also believe that *In Memoriam James Joyce* should have been included entire. The few lyric passages here selected lose much of their power in isolation, whereas the poem as a whole is a moving record of one man's struggle to build a work which will represent what Dr. Grieve has described, in a recent essay on Ezra Pound, as "the growing end of poetry today, corresponding to the vast complexity of the modern world and the unparalleled perspectives opening out before mankind as a result of the tremendous developments of the sciences in our time." Despite the large disparity between MacDiarmid's aims and achievement, which flaws much of his later work, this poem has a certain rugged integrity which is not conveyed by selection.

Some other poems which were omitted from the collected edition are included in a finely representative volume called *A Lap of Honour* (price 25/-) which was published by MacGibbon & Kee in August 1967 to mark Dr. Grieve's seventy-fifth birthday.

I have already quoted from Iain Crichton Smith's valuable essay on MacDiarmid, *The Golden Lyric*<sup>1</sup>. He defines the individual quality of the Scots poems better than any critic before

<sup>1</sup> Akros Publications. Price 10/6d. Available from 14 Parklands Avenue, Penwortham, Preston, Lancashire.

him by a detailed commentary on *The Watergaw*, and he concludes: "In no other lyrics do I find their special combination of imaginative power, tenderness, wit, intelligence (but an intelligence which has not been divorced from the feelings) ... The Lyrics made themselves necessary. They appeared through him."

Much of *The Golden Lyric* is devoted to adverse criticism of Dr Grieve's long poems. He says that he has "now come to the conclusion that MacDiarmid did take a wrong turning when he began on his poetry of ideas." — At a time when poetry is in danger of killing itself by deliberate limitation to an ever narrowing area of experience, I believe that some of Iain Crichton Smith's statements should be contested, but the core of his argument, that "if the poem remains on the level of the idea no final result can ever be arrived at", cannot be questioned. In this connection he draws a parallel between Hugh MacDiarmid and Blake: "both begin with lyrics of a certain kind which contain a fusion of the intellect and feeling which is highly unusual and at times hallucinatory. Both poets go on to write long poems based rather insecurely on systems which are fairly private..." This valid comparison could be extended to deal with the intermittent failure of both poets to evolve a form adequate to their themes.

But Mr Crichton Smith is on less sure ground when he makes a common, and fundamentally mistaken, comparison with *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound. The central objection to some of MacDiarmid's long poems seems to me that, unlike Pound, he only rarely achieves a form that can integrate the heterogeneous elements he is seeking to weld together. This is probably why his later work sometimes reads like prose notes for poems that have never been written. Where Pound is always moving towards a greater concision, MacDiarmid tends to be diffuse and too much concerned with abstract theories of poetry.

Mr Anthony Burgess recently carried the comparison with Ezra Pound even further in a *Sunday Times* review, and, by attributing qualities to MacDiarmid's work which it manifestly does not possess, succeeded in obscuring all its real achievement. When he says that "His capacity for fusing scraps of diverse learning into imaginative statements is as great as Pound's; his ear is as good in the free forms..." it is clear that Mr Burgess is to a large extent deaf to rhythm. Such insensitive, uncritical praise only eclipses a just estimate of MacDiarmid. It does more harm than Ian Hamilton's equally mistaken, destructive article that appeared about the same time in *The Observer*.

MacDiarmid himself defines the weaknessess of his work with

more honesty and precision than his critics; he realizes that it runs the risk of being, to quote from *In Memoriam James Joyce*:

The reflection of ideas and values  
Not yet wholly assimilated by the sensibility,  
So that I seem to be resolving my conflicts  
By a kind of verbal self-hypnosis.

"It is improbable", Edwin Muir once wrote, "that Scotland will produce any writer in English of the first rank" and another reason, not touched on by Iain Crichton Smith, for the unevenness of MacDiarmid's later work is to be looked for in his use of the English language. There is at times a deadness and lack of character about his rhythm — a uniformity which blurs distinctions and levels gradations instead of drawing them intact into unity. He writes with little of the feeling for natural speech that he shows in his Scots poems, even sometimes using inversions and nineteenth century poetic diction. It is often said that it is impossible for a poet to write well in a language that is alien to him, and MacDiarmid occasionally writes Southern English with an insensitivity that I think springs from its innate foreignness to the tradition to which he is indigenous. It is doubtful whether any poet could be equally at home in both English and Scots. English for a Scot is the language of prose as Latin was in the Middle Ages. Scots, or Gaelic is the language of poetry and the prosiness of MacDiarmid's later poems stems directly from his decision to write them in English.

But, although the rhythm of his English poems is always closer to that of prose than verse, there are times (*The Lament for the Great Music* is a good example) when the ideas are "assimilated by the sensibility" and embodied poetically so that the result is magnificent. This occurs in various contemplative poems where the 'philosophy' stems directly from experiences in desolate or lonely places. MacDiarmid's finest later poems often have this sense of place integrating the fragmentation of his curiosity. This is true of the many memorable poems in *A Lap of Honour*, particularly of *Diamond Body*, with its detailed description of sea flora and fauna that has a quality akin to passages of Agassiz which deal with the "intelligence working in nature":

And now I am in the cave. A moment ago  
I saw the broad leather-brown belts of the tangleweed,  
And the minute forms that fix themselves

In soft carmine lace-stencils upon the shingle,  
The notched wrack gemmed with lime-white bead-shells  
Showing like pearls on a dark braid,

Other poems that reach this integration of the particular and the general through a rootedness in place, are *Direadh III*, parts of *In Memoriam James Joyce*, *Island Funeral* and *On Reading Professor Ifor Williams's "Canu Aneurin" in Difficult Days*.

The last mentioned poem binds, in an imaginative order, the living myths of this island,

I who never fail to detect now and again,  
In the Hebridean and Shetland and Cornish waters I most frequent,

By subtle signs Myrddin's ship of glass  
Which has floated invisibly around the seas  
Ever since Arfderydd a millenium and a half ago,

with the "jewel-like beauty" of the "glowing moss or lichen" of a Winter wood, which recalls the forest of Celyddon where Merlin Sylvestris fled after the battle of Arfderydd, and all this is set against the "microcosmic human chaos" of Europe in 1938. He draws strength, in that dark Winter of impending war, by thinking of "the ancestral ties between Scotland and Wales" (the subject matter here has an affinity with the work of David Jones), and of Aneurin's poem about the battle of Catraeth, of which he says, "It is not the glory, but the pity and waste of war / That inspires its highest passages." The total experience of the poem "lies somewhere between wistfulness and perception", but it is the actuality of the mosses and lichen, shining forth in "the lowset Southern winter sun", that gives imaginative validity to the whole.

At such times a balance is achieved between all the conflicting elements of his poetry and he goes some way to creating a rhythm to express this, and I think here also of a passage from *In Memoriam James Joyce* which begins:

Everlasting layers  
Of ideas, images, feelings,  
Have fallen upon my brain  
Softly as light.  
Each succession has seemed to bury  
All that went before  
And yet, in reality,  
Not one has been extinguished —

This sense of "the interdependencies of life", of serenity, and rest, amid a welter of disparate experience, he never excludes, is probably the most moving quality of MacDiarmid's later work. And although often his language only lamely expresses the true seriousness of his vision, I believe that he has written a body of durable poetry both in Scots, and to a lesser extent in English, that "formed by cataclysm and central fires" and of "broken lights", realizes, at least in flashes,

the harmony of that  
Which is,  
The pure phenomenon  
Abiding in the eternal radiance.

## AGENDA

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## ALEXANDER SCOTT

### HUGH MACDIARMID AND THE SCOTS TRADITION

Of all the hundreds of thousands of words which have been printed on Hugh MacDiarmid's aims and achievements, some of the most perceptive are among the earliest, written by John Buchan in his preface to MacDiarmid's first volume of poems in Scots, *Sangschaw* [Song Festival], in 1925:—

["MacDiarmid] has set himself a task which is at once reactionary and revolutionary... He would treat Scots as a living language and apply it to matters which have been foreign to it since the sixteenth century. Since there is no canon of the vernacular, he makes his own, as Burns did, and borrows words and idioms from the old masters. He confines himself to no one dialect, but selects where he pleases between Aberdeen and the Cheviots. This audacity... is a proof that a new spirit is to-day abroad in the North, which... is both conservative and radical—a determination to keep Scotland in the main march of the world's interests, and at the same time to forgo no part of her ancient heritage."

Buchan was right to stress the importance of the medieval tradition of Scots poetry for MacDiarmid's endeavour to create verse in Scots which expressed higher reaches of spiritual and intellectual concern and deeper levels of emotional and physical experience than the eighteenth-century Scottish bards had aimed at. For MacDiarmid's slogan was "Not Burns—Dunbar", a phrase from his essay *Albyn: or Scotland and the Future* (1927), where he expressed the view that "The history of Scottish vernacular poetry... since the days of the Auld Makars, is a history of the progressive relinquishment of magnificent potentialities for the creation of a literature which might well have rivalled English."

During the early medieval period the Lowland Scots, a people of mixed racial inheritance—part-Celtic, part-Teutonic—and differing linguistic habits, came to speak a variant of the northern dialect of English, in which John Barbour (c. 1320-1395) composed the first major work from Lowland Scotland, *The Brus*, a biographical poem on the exploits of King Robert the Bruce written in the style of the French romances of chivalry. Over the years, this variant of northern English developed into the language which is technically termed "Middle Scots", and in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Lowlanders created a literature, largely in verse, capable of expressing effectively the whole of life between (and including) heaven and hell.



Scotland produced the finest major love-poem of the fifteenth century, *The Kingis Quair* [The King's Book], which more often than not is attributed to King James I. (1394-1437) and which certainly tells a story related to the incidents of his early life. Although James's literary method derived from the French allegories of love, he was an innovator, working towards naturalism, and if he was influenced by Chaucer, both in style and in language—he used southern English as well as Scottish forms—he looked at the world of the senses through individual eyes.

A cruder poet than James, the mysterious figure known as Blind Harry or Henry the Minstrel, who composed the heroic romance of *Wallace* around 1460, continued the Barbour tradition of military epic. In the folk-lore of the hundred and fifty years since Wallace's execution by the English, the Scottish hero would appear to have become a kind of demi-god, the victorious embodiment of his people's desire to see "the auld enemy" south of the Border humbled in the dust, and Blind Harry's work was often violent and sometimes barbaric. But while *Wallace* may be regarded as a projection of the more brutal fantasies of the folk, in at least one passage—"Go live in war, go live in cruel pain"—the minstrel becomes a lyric poet, achieving the true cry.

The most remarkable of the fifteenth-century makars, Robert Henryson (fl. 1480) was one of the very greatest narrative poets ever to practice his art within these islands. He was a stylist of the highest skill, with an apparently effortless ability to vary the density of his colloquialisms, and the nature of his images, in accordance with every facet of his subject-matter. Whatever his themes, and whether he wrote of them humorously or contemplatively, philosophically or tragically, the perfection of his style was such that the reader's attention is never distracted from matter to manner. Where the style of the majority of poets is at most a veil, and at least a glass, between the reader and the content, in Henryson there seems to be no veil and no glass, only a subtle manipulation of light and shade which places the content in the perspective most proper to the poet's purpose.

His beast-fables—where he was working in a well-established European tradition, and frequently based his Scots versions on French or Latin originals—were superbly swift and racy in their use of vivid colloquialisms and proverbial phrases. In his *Testament of Cresseid* (a sequel to Chaucer's masterpiece, and equally masterly in its own manner of concision) the gravity of the language was everywhere illuminated and given urgency by images drawn directly from everyday life.

Below Henryson's narratives, and supporting them, lay a strong construction of doctrine, of social and political philosophy whose base was finally religious. In the work of his younger contemporary, William Dunbar (c. 1460-1520), the reader is impressed less by philosophy than by personality. Dunbar's dissatisfaction with the world was fundamental, and on this fulcrum his attitudes see-sawed violently from one emotional extreme to another—from the extravagant glee of the "Flying" [Scolding] poems where he escaped from his dissatisfaction with reality into a purely verbal world where nothing existed except hundreds of separate terms of abuse which he built into great mountains of insult, to the opposite mood in his moralising poems, where he turned his back on the life which had disappointed him and set his hopes on futurity.

The totality of Dunbar's work is extraordinarily varied, with tremendous range of manner, matter and metre. His control of form was consummate, whether he used the French ballade, the Latin hymns, or the old alliterative measure, and always he matched form and content, sense and sound. His allegorical poems were gorgeous tapestries of aureate language; in his satirical pieces the vigorous colloquial idiom gave the verse a sharp cutting edge; and in his poems of resignation, the quiet simplicity of the style exactly suited the passivity of the content. His scope—moving easily from the lewd to the enlightened, from the profound to the profane—was wider than that of any other Scottish poet, medieval or modern, until the advent of MacDiarmid himself; and the dark irony which ran through much of his writing still possesses compelling power.

Scarcely less remarkable was the achievement of Gawain Douglas (c. 1475-1522), whose Scots version of Virgil's *Aeneid* was the first great translation of classical Latin poetry into a European vernacular. The enrichment of the Scots tradition by means of translations had begun at least a century earlier, with versions of French romances on Alexander the Great, and was to be continued in every century thereafter, but Douglas's work has remained the prime source of emulation, never surpassed. Again, in some of the original prologues added to his Virgil, he emerged as the first nature poet in extra-Celtic Britain, the earliest (apart from some song-composers) to treat the natural scene not merely as a background to human action, but as being in itself interesting and significant.

An equal concern with actuality was displayed by Sir David Lindsay (c. 1486-1555), although his was directed towards the social scene. The Bernard Shaw of his age, preoccupied with the reform of church and state, Lindsay was a master of the art

of sweetening the pill of social criticism with the sugar of comic effects, and in his still-celebrated morality play, *The Three Estates*, he cajoled his audience into agreement with his views. While he was less of an artist than Henryson and Dunbar, this was not so much because of his didacticism—there was didactic purpose behind most of Henryson's work, too—but rather because he was often so intent on what he had to say that he was comparatively careless of the form in which it got said. In this his example has been unfortunate—for MacDiarmid, on occasion, as well as for others. But if his verse was frequently pedestrian, it was just as often lively and pointed, especially in the broad comedy scenes of his dramatic masterpiece, where indecency and hilarity tumbled together so madly that criticism is still knocked head-over-heels into laughter.

The last performance of *The Three Estates* in Lindsay's lifetime took place in 1554, when the Queen Regent, members of the aristocracy, and "an exceeding great number of people" watched it played. Six years later the Queen-Regent was dead, and members of the aristocracy who had taken up arms against her French Catholic allies had established a Protestant form of religion in Scotland. The ideological unity of the Lowland Scots was shattered, and their linguistic unity was also doomed—for the Reformed ministers used a translation of the Bible into English from which to expound the gospel, and this began the displacement of Scots by English as the language for the discussion of "matters of moment" by educated Scotsmen.

During the next forty years, as long as the court still remained in Edinburgh, royal patronage continued to be extended to Scots poets, and Alexander Scott (c. 1530-1585) composed his superbly singable love-poems, bawdy, tender and scathing by turns, while such makars as Alexander Montgomerie (c. 1545-1615) and William Fowler (d. 1612) achieved considerable success in the "golden style" of the Renaissance. But the writing was already on the wall for all to see in the work of the religious poet, the Rev. Alexander Hume (c. 1557-1609), where the influence of "the Bible in English" showed plainly in increasing Anglicisation of vocabulary and idiom, and the departure of King James VI. to London in 1603 to become King James I. of England led to a disregard of Scots, in favour of English, on the part of the courtier class who followed him and the poets who served them. The political and economic predominance of England, and its contemporary cultural ascendancy, helped to hasten the process of Anglicisation among lettered men. Although the large bulk of the Scottish people continued to speak Scots as they went

about their everyday affairs, the literary language ceased to be used, and that part of its vocabulary which was concerned with other than merely mundane affairs dropped out of sight and out of memory.

Throughout the late medieval period, Lowland Scotland had possessed a distinct cultural identity, for the nobility, the burgesses and the peasants all spoke the same Scots tongue, the small scale of the various social organisations of the time compelled the different classes to "live together", and aristocratic art-forms were forever interacting with popular ones. But after 1603, when the aristocratic and the educated adopted English, there was a division between the literary language of the élite and the tongue spoken by most of the population.

For more than a century, while those Scottish poets who aimed at the higher levels of achievement were following English fashions, the art-poetry of the great medieval makers was ignored, either forgotten or disregarded. However, the peasants and the townsfolk, at work and at play, went on singing the old folk-songs and ballads—and creating new ones—while some country gentlemen carried on the medieval tradition of writing light verse about the life of the "lower orders".

The eighteenth-century revival of verse in Scots began *circa* 1707, partly as a patriotic gesture against the Union of Parliaments, and at first the poets followed the styles of the preceeding hundred years, most of which were rural. Allan Ramsay (c. 1684-1758) collected folk-songs and ballads, composed sequels to the anonymous medieval poem, *Christ's Kirk on the Green*, which painted a highly-coloured comic picture of village life, and wrote a pastoral play, *The Gentle Shepherd*.

But although Ramsay grew up in Dumfriesshire, he spent his adult life in Edinburgh, and while much of his verse looked back to the rural community of his earlier years, he also attempted to adapt his rustic models to depict various aspects of city life. Following the example of Robert Sempill's mock elegy on the piper Habbie Simson (c. 1640), and employing the verse form then called "standard Habbie" but later designated "the Burns stanza", Ramsay portrayed a series of individual Edinburgh worthies in rough, vigorous, slyly-comic verse. His work, like folk-poetry, was full of naturalistic detail, but the intellectual level was not high, and his colloquial style was incapable of the sublime.

Where Ramsay, in *Christ's Kirk*, had celebrated the life of a whole village community, Robert Fergusson (1750-1774) used the same technique—bustling action and abundant comedy—to

depict the folk-ways of Edinburgh's populace. In this, so far as the Scots tradition is concerned, he was—and remains—a pioneer, for the later success of Burns, a countryman, in the celebration of country themes, gave a new impetus to the description of rural manners.

Although Fergusson sometimes wrote on rustic themes, too, he was more often an urban poet, and always an educated one. Academic discipline lay behind the formal excellence and clarity of his verse, and easy command of his learning enabled him to incorporate classical references and Latin quotations into his Scots without any sense of strain, while he could satirise high politics as sharply as low life. When the American critic Lowell described the most effective literary style as "the tongue of the people in the mouth of the scholar," he might have been writing of Fergusson.

Robert Burns (1759-1796) brought a more penetrating irony, a more uproarious comedy, a more touching tenderness, and a more powerful passion, to verse in Scots, but he added little to its forms and themes. Greater than Fergusson's although his work was, in at least one respect it represented a retreat from a position which the earlier poet had already attained. Before the end of his all-too-brief career, Fergusson had mastered the art of intellectual discussion in Scots, treating ideas with the self-confidence of a scholar. Burns, perhaps because of an over-sensitive awareness of his educational deficiencies, tended towards a defensive jocularly in Scots or a somewhat self-conscious demonstration of ease in English—more often the latter—whenever he became philosophical.

For the nineteenth century, however, Burns was less the philosopher than the singer—inevitably so, since twenty will sing a song where only one will read a poem, and few songs have ever been more singable, or more worth singing, than those which Burns took from "tradition" and virtually recreated in an idiom which was at once the folk's and his own, a brilliant individual enhancement of community art. The emphasis on the lyrical aspect of Scots poetry which resulted from this achievement received further weight from the success of Walter Scott and James Hogg, during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, in collecting ballads and in recapturing the ballad qualities of dash, drive, colour and mystery in their own verse. The highly idiosyncratic work of William Tennant (1784-1848), who developed the style of Ariosto in *Anster Fair* and that of Lindsay in *Papistry Storm'd*, a lively mock-epic which is the only successful extended poem in Scots between the sixteenth century and our own, was largely overlooked.

Well before 1850, Burns had come to be regarded as Scotland's patron saint of love, liberty and labour. But the evangelical revival inside and outside the Free Church caused his audience to avert their eyes from his provocative and intellectually-stimulating satires, with their radical attack on religious conservatism, and to concentrate on his domestic idylls and his love-lyrics, with his humorous character-sketches and drinking-songs as the lightest permissible comic relief. Many of the poems in the successive editions of the *Whistlebinkie* anthology (1832) reduced the range and power of Burns's genius to a lowest common denominator of amorous alcoholism, and even those verses which deftly described the surface mannerisms of the Scottish scene and the more apparent eccentricities of the Scottish character were lacking in critical penetration and emotional force. Exceptions to the rule there sometimes were—Outram, Bell Scott, George Macdonald—but the rule was deadly.

In language, too, the *Whistlebinkie* writers were more restricted in scope than Burns, who had sought the riches of Scots "from a' the airts the wind can blaw", whereas his successors tended to confine themselves each to his own local dialect, eked out with English whenever the patois was found wanting. During the 1880's, however, Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) and "Hugh Haliburton" (1846-1922) reverted to Burns's practice, weaving a literary Scots out of threads drawn from different dialects. Both poets had intelligence and wit, but some of Stevenson's Scots satires were modelled so closely on those of Burns as to be dangerously near pastiche, and Haliburton's Scots versions of Horatian odes—in a tradition as old as Ramsay—often smacked of the patronising literary exercise.

When *Hamewith* by Charles Murray (1864-1941) was published in 1909, Andrew Lang commented, "Poetry more truly Scots than that of Mr Murray is no longer written." The Aberdeenshire dialect in which Murray wrote was one of the richest in the country, and his work was rooted in the everyday realities of the North-East community. Since he shared the humour of the characters he presented, the sly, sardonic, "off-taking" wit, his observation of external behaviour was both exact and pointed. Yet he never penetrated the secret places of the heart or the subtler intricacies of the intellect; he became embarrassed (and embarrassing) when he attempted direct expression of personal feeling; his style, though close to the cadence and idiom of Aberdeenshire speech, was often prosaic; and he tended to look towards the past.

But the First World War compelled him into contemporaneity, and the best of all his dramatic monologues was "Dockens Afore



His Peers" (1916), a portrait of a farmer before an exemption tribunal which, as an ironically-acute study of provincial chicanery and self-interest, was an astonishing achievement in an age of civilian jingoism. Again, the most passionate of his lyrics, "Gin I Was God," was a brilliantly forceful expression of disillusion, and his Scots version of Horace's "Parcus Deorem" delivered a savage comic denunciation of the war and its aftermath.

The advance towards keener criticism and deeper emotional honesty represented by Murray's war-time and post-war poems was matched by others. While the work of Violet Jacob (1863-1946) belonged to the "truly rural" tradition, her character-sketches penetrated below the social aspects of her men and women to express their more intimate joys and sorrows. Marion Angus (1866-1946) had a narrower range, most of her verse providing variations on the twin themes of sorrow for lost youth and lamentation for lost love, but within her limited scope she expressed considerable intensity of passion, and she had notable technical mastery of lyrical forms.

Tendencies towards parochialism and insularity which had dominated much of Scots verse since Burns were scarcely resisted in the original poems of Alexander Gray (b. 1882), but his translations of Heine (1920) were a return to the internationalism of the mediæval tradition. No trace of the literary exercise here—Gray effected the transference of the lyrical impulse from one tongue, one culture, into another without loss of immediacy of impact or authenticity of expression. He introduced a post-romantic sensibility into a literature still dominated by earlier modes.

About this time, too, Lewis Spence (1874-1955) was attempting to create a literary Scots based on the language employed by the old makars. His verse had a chill remoteness, but its cold, langorous beauty struck a note long unheard in the bucolic good cheer characteristic of nineteenth-century Scots.

In the early twenties, then, there was a certain "forward-march" atmosphere about the Scottish literary scene, due at least in part to the war which had revealed the limitations of attitudes inherited from the immediate past. Between 1920 and 1922, C. M. Grieve (b. 1892) edited three issues of an anthology of "representative selections from certain living Scots poets," *Northern Numbers*. From 1920, the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club was campaigning for the revival of Scots. In August 1922 appeared the first number of a new literary review, *The Scottish Chapbook*, edited by C. M. Grieve and dedicated to the proposition, "Not Traditions—Precedents!"

From the beginning of his career, Grieve had as one of his aims "To bring Scottish Literature into closer touch with current European tendencies in technique and ideation," and at first he had opposed the contemporary movement towards the revival of Scots, believing it to be "a backwater." But Scots was his native tongue, and the current propaganda in its favour led him to investigate it and to experiment with its possibilities. In the course of this experimentation, C. M. Grieve gave birth to "Hugh MacDiarmid," the greatest living Scots poet, in whose work both traditions and precedents were to play their parts.

Like Stevenson and Burns, MacDiarmid employed a literary Scots which, while it was based on the speech of his native place (Langholm in Dumfriesshire), incorporated words which were still alive in the mouths of the people in other parts of Scotland; and he also employed terms which he found enjoying a somewhat dubious immortality in the work of the Scots poets and prose-writers of the past. Most often, in the lyrics of *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep* [Small Beer] (1926), and in his masterpiece, the extended rhapsody *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926), he used archaisms with fine tact, so weaving them into the texture of spoken Scots that they drew life from their context.

MacDiarmid was the first Scots poet whose original verse expressed a post-romantic sensibility; and he was the first to be acutely aware of the contemporary world. The eight short lines of "The Bonnie Broukit Bairn" ["The Lovely Neglected Child"] contained immensity, for the poem's concern was not confined to a single local parish, as in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Scots fashion, but extended to the whole of creation, as the individual stood alone in the darkness, confronting the world and the stars above him.

Mars is braw in crammasy,	<i>fine in scarlet</i>
Venus in a green silk gown,	
The auld mune shak's her gowden feathers,	<i>moon; golden</i>
Their starry talk 's a wheen o blethers,	<i>lot of nonsense</i>
Nane for thee a thochtie sparin',	<i>small thought</i>
Earth, thou bonnie broukit bairn!	
—But greet, an' in your tears ye'll droun	<i>weep; drown</i>
The haill clanjamfrie!	<i>whole collection</i>

Again, in "The Seamless Garment," where MacDiarmid sought to express his conception of how society should be woven into an integrated and harmonious whole, he used images derived from the weaving of cloth in a Border textile-mill, the images of a



predominantly industrial world, not—as in nearly all earlier Scots verse—those of a community almost entirely rural.

In *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*, the short lyrics possessed intensity of passion, audacity of imagery, and original and often profoundly-haunting rhythmical patterns. MacDiarmid had the power to create in a few lines an emotional force of extraordinary strength, and to evoke scenes and situations which, while they were perfectly precise and definite in themselves, nevertheless suggested a whole world of experience behind and beyond them.

*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, the first major poem in Scots for at least a century, ranged widely over time and space, exploring the fundamental mysteries of love and death and human destiny. In form, the work was a dramatic monologue, a meditation on Scotland, the world and the universe as these appeared to an intoxicated reveller who had tumbled into a roadside ditch while plodding his weary way homeward from the pub. While his drunken imagination reeled and plunged across the cosmos, the hero delighted equally in the gorgeous and the grotesque, the obscene and the absurd, the mystical and the material, finding beauty in the terrible and terror in the trumpery. Abrupt transitions and sudden changes of mood were dictated by the association of ideas in the drunk man's mind, and the poem proceeded by means of a series of shocks of surprise, as the sublime suggested the ridiculous and the ridiculous the sublime.

Bound together by the complex character of the protagonist, who was by turns a satirical critic of Scottish life, a wondering spectator of his own situation, a lover of beauty whose senses were alive to the finger-tips, and a speculator on the mysteries of time and fate, *A Drunk Man* was at once a portrait of the author, a vision of the world, and an exploration of the nature of reality. "A sardonic lover in the routh [plenty] of contraries," MacDiarmid created new and striking harmonies from elements of comedy, satire, farce, documentary, lyricism and tragedy, the range and richness of his personality going far towards resolving the contradictions of experience.

There can be little doubt either of MacDiarmid's awareness of the Scots tradition, or of his enhancement of it. He is even more fond of battle than Barbour, and an even better hater than Blind Harry; he has written love poetry as moving as James I. 's, as contradictory as Alexander Scott's, as lyrical as Burns's; he has expressed as vivid a colloquial morality and as stark an idiomatic tragedy as Henryson, while surpassing him in lyrical energy; he has even more personal force and paradoxical scope than Dunbar, and greater staying-power; like Douglas, he has enriched the tradition as a superb translator; his social satire has been

as stinging, and his farce as lewdly intoxicating, as Lindsay's; he has shown himself as concerned with the contemporary European *avant-garde* as ever were Montgomerie and Fowler; his evocations of the Scottish landscape, as sensuous as those of Douglas and Hume, have more formal control than the first and more passion than the second; he has adapted the traditional ballad style to modern themes, and his "Empty Vessel" is as brilliant an enhancement of folk-song as anything by Burns; his delight in individual idiosyncrasies is even keener than Ramsay's; more often than not he has all the formal excellence of Fergusson, with a more frequently-exercised ability to employ Scots for intellectual discussion; like Burns, he is equally effective in comedy, tenderness and passion, and masterly in satire of religious conservatism. Even his faults—an occasional carelessness which recalls Lindsay's, a tendency at times to lapse into bathos which is reminiscent of Ramsay—have their traditional counterparts.

The present writer, having lived long among academics, is not partial to superlatives. Yet he is unable to resist the conclusion that Hugh MacDiarmid, who has restored Scots as a language of the highest poetical art, is the greatest of all Scots makars, and one of the great poets of the world.

## DUNCAN GLEN

### HUGH MACDIARMID: SUPPORTING ROLES

A recent critic was only echoing earlier cries of not a few predecessors when he suggested that 'there are few things in modern verse more dismal than MacDiarmid's furious frequent flogging of the dead Scottish Pegasus' and there is no doubt that Hugh MacDiarmid has written some very bad poetry under the flag of his nationalism, although I doubt if there was much of it in the *Collected Poems* and *A Lap of Honour* that were under review. Generally, however, MacDiarmid's commitments have been beneficial to his poetry. Indeed, what MacDiarmid has, among other things, been doing here is providing himself with intellectual poetic equipment to support his imagination. This is, of course, a device common to many poets, although some may feel less need than MacDiarmid to turn their systems of thought into public campaigns. Much of his campaigning, no doubt, is a reflection of MacDiarmid's fighting personality, but the subliminal ego of the poet may have known what it was about here in that, in the fractured and isolated cultural situation which existed in Scotland, this public campaign was probably as essential to the poet's survival as was a personal belief in his cultural theories.

MacDiarmid was building much further back than a poet fortunate enough to be born in a time and in a culture which could give the sort of supporting environment MacDiarmid made for himself through his nationalistic and other theories. Of course, the public battles which his theories produced would have killed most poets quicker than any sense of isolation.

Some of MacDiarmid's theories strike me as plain daft, although I find others very convincing and all of them stimulating and, in themselves, a fascinating monument to the most fertile mind Scotland has produced in centuries. I am not here suggesting that MacDiarmid is a great creative thinker and, indeed, I have an idea he was thinking as much of himself as Yeats when he put the following quote at the head of a poem addressed to Yeats: 'The philosophical content of his poetry [Yeats's] is neither consistent nor systematic. The poet was not a creative thinker, and his genius drew from many sources and influences, lacking a supreme originality. Here, in fact, is an intellectualism, which stands apart from the classic English tradition.'

One of the strengths of MacDiarmid as a poet has been his ability to build up these intellectual theories in the eclectic manner ascribed to Yeats in the above sentence and, even more important, when he has outgrown them—as a poet—to disregard them as he builds up new or changed theories. He has often enough attacked others for not accepting ideas which he himself disregards in his poetic practice. These theories then, far from being a restrictive influence on his poetry, have been supporting structures for him and which he especially needed as a poet writing in isolation and in the ruins of the Scottish literary tradition. Without much doubt the most fruitful of MacDiarmid's personal theory building has been that which he built in the twenties and which has been important outside his own poetry in that it has produced the Scottish Literary Revival. But for all that, his theories for a renaissance of Scottish poetry were also one of the main cultural supports for his own poetry.

These nationalistic theories for an independent Scottish literature written in Scots or Gaelic were not, however, the first literary ideas to which MacDiarmid publicly committed himself and indeed, he had what was a Saul-to-Paul conversion (if he will forgive the association) before he became the Scots makar. Hugh MacDiarmid, or C. M. Grieve as he still was then, first came to the notice of the literary world as a writer of rather mystical lyrics in English. It is interesting that by 1920 he already had the ability to organise supporting movements for himself. This first was known as the *Northern Numbers* movement after the title of a series of annual anthologies he edited 1920-22. There was that sense of things happening that prevailed just after that war fought to save small nations, and the young MacDiarmid clearly intended to be at the forefront of these literary stirrings. Always he has been an avant-gardiste and the last place he would look in 1920 for advanced literary ideas was in the tiny kailyard that was Scottish literature. He was looking to Dublin and continental Europe and to London but not to the fuddy-duddy London that was represented by the London Burns Club which was then beginning to promote the idea of preserving the Scottish language. Immediately MacDiarmid attacked this as a reactionary idea and raised the English language as 'an immensely superior medium of expression'. The flags of nationalism were also being raised in that he was advising Scottish writers to shed their provinciality by looking not to London but Europe and to follow the example of the Irish and produce a comparable Scottish literary revival.

Then suddenly—and that is no exaggeration it seems—the poet MacDiarmid turned on the theorist in himself and made him eat his words; his imagination had been set alight by the discovery of old Scots words in Sir James Wilson's *Lowland Scotch*. There he found the words 'on-ding', 'yow-trummle', 'antrin', 'watergaw', 'weet nicht' and the phrase 'There's nae reek the laverock's hoose the-nicht' which he took, and worked, and subtly modified, into his first and now-famous Scots lyric 'The Watergaw'. His imagination was obviously split wide open and very quickly MacDiarmid produced some of the very greatest of his Scots lyrics. But this was not where he had intended going. The avant-garde writer must have felt very insecure writing in Scots with its centuryold association with infantile versifying in the Burns tradition and no doubt the poet was very glad when his theorist self discerned the possibility that Joyce's great achievement in *Ulysses* could be equalled by a Scot writing in Scots. Significantly in this regard MacDiarmid saw Scots as 'a vast storehouse of just the very peculiar and subtle effects which modern European literature in general is assiduously seeking ... It is an inchoate Marcel Proust—a Dostoevskian debris of ideas—an inexhaustable quarry of subtle and significant sound'.

It was at this time also that MacDiarmid made Professor Gregory Smith's theory of the Caledonian Antisyzygy his own and originally this was also used by him to link his Scots poems to the avant-garde movements in European literature. Smith had suggested that Scottish literature is very varied and indeed 'almost a zig-zag of contradiction' which reflected similar contrasts shown by the Scot throughout history. To Smith 'the sudden jostling of contraries seems to preclude any relationship by literary suggestion. The one invades the other without warning'. MacDiarmid with enthusiasm saw in this contacts with 'the most advanced schools of thought in every country in Europe today'. He saw Scots making it comparatively easy for the Scottish writer to achieve 'the very effects and swift transitions which other literatures are for the most part unsuccessfully endeavouring to cultivate in languages that have a very different and inferior bias'.

This is an interesting theory with, as Kenneth Buthlay has noted, roots in Coleridge's theories of the imagination, but I cannot but wonder why only MacDiarmid at that time made the breakthrough that took Scots poetry back into the mainstream of European literature, and the obvious answer is that the same could be said of this theory as Eliot said of Coleridge's

distinction between Imagination and Fancy; we are here simply talking about the difference between good and bad poetry. But for MacDiarmid personally these associations with Europe and the identification of these characteristics as essentially Scottish (as they may be) was a strength to him working in the moribund Scottish tradition. Working also now to revive a tradition which he believed had been swamped under the dull, conforming sterility of modern anglicised Scotland; this again was of value to the poet who was acting in both a reactionary and a progressive manner by his use of Scots. But MacDiarmid is a born propagandist and fighter for causes, so that it came naturally to him no doubt.

But all this is also poetic equipment as what had happened, I have no doubt, was that in Coleridge's words, MacDiarmid has discovered through Scots 'the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement... The sense of musical delight... with a power of reducing multitude into unity of effect, and modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling'. These are well-known words but they describe perfectly for me the sense of power and freedom that MacDiarmid obviously felt when he began writing in Scots and indeed the exhilaration which so many of us have found, thanks to his example, when we have turned from our educated English to the disreputable Scots. It is too bad, of course, that the unity of effect, etc. are just as hard to achieve in Scots as in English.

These theories of MacDiarmid have had a wide influence in Scotland and they also immediately gave him something of a tradition to work within but he knew only too well that

'...poetry's no made in a lifetime  
And I lack a livin' past'

And for all the structure of a literary revival that he built up he also knew, as he said in the same poem:

'There's nae sign o' a mate to be seen'.

Having built up these convincing theories around the Scottish language, MacDiarmid backed them up even more convincingly in his poetry of the next eight or nine years, but by the middle thirties he was moving away from Scots and usually well-away from the tight form of his early lyrics. He was by 1933, advocating the use of an extended English and

suggesting that a 'concerted effort to extend the general vocabulary and make it more adequate to the enormous range and multitudinous intensive specialisations of contemporary knowledge is long overdue'. This is, of course, a transference or extension of his use of an extended Scots, although he personally believed that he had only touched the fringe of Joycean experimentation in his Scots poems. It may be, however, that he had pushed Scots as far as he could take it in poems such as 'Scots Unbound'. Certainly he pushed it further than anything attempted by any of his successors in the Scots tradition.

Contemporary with this move from Scots to English, MacDiarmid was moving from the National Party of Scotland to the Communist Party of Great Britain. He continued to advocate a Scottish nationalism in literature, and indeed politically also as he was expelled from the Communist Party in 1938 for 'nationalist deviation', but his literary nationalism was moving increasingly towards the Gaelic background of Scottish culture. Towards a pan-Celticism which also had associations with his communism or Scottish Workers Republicanism in that he saw the Celtic countries uniting to form independent republics. MacDiarmid had written of this Gaelic idea in the twenties but, perhaps influenced by the end of his own Scots period and a revulsion against the growing parochialism of the National movement in Scotland, he saw, with greater internationalism, not only Scotland but all Western civilisation renewing itself at Gaelic sources. There was also a link here with the East. In the introduction to his *Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* MacDiarmid noted Yeats's interest in the Upanishads and suggested that the movement 'back to the ancient Gaelic classics and then North to Iceland and then East to Persia and India is the course the refluence of Gaelic genius must take'. MacDiarmid has been criticised for his lack of scholarly discrimination in his advocacy of this Gaelic Idea, but whilst this may be regrettable from a scholarly stance, the poet knew what he was about just as, to wave a white rag to a blue lion, Robert Graves knew what he was about in *The White Goddess*. He was still creating for himself as he said in a revealing, if bad, poem, 'The Kulturkampf':

... a tradition, inspire us with faith,  
Help us to find new gods.

MacDiarmid by the late thirties had moved on to his very long poems which include *In Memoriam James Joyce* and *The*



*Kind of Poetry I Want* and the Gaelic Idea was further developed in them. These wide-ranging poems with their expression of his belief in an internationalised language are a further development of MacDiarmid's Joycean extension of language but it did seem to some of his Scottish admirers that they were also a further abandonment of the Renaissance Movement he built around his use of Scots. In reply he has seen these poems as part of that movement's aim to intellectualise Scottish poetry and break out of the anti-intellectual slough of the post-Burnsian tradition, but in reading the poems, I cannot but think that emotionally the poet has moved on from the need of involvement in the original movement. But emotion is almost a dirty word to the MacDiarmid of the later poetry who in *In Memoriam James Joyce* cries for a high classical poetry:

'An exacting intellectual undertaking  
The expression to a far greater extent  
Of thought and reason than of emotion,  
And fully understanding  
The source of its emotions and ideas'

But again returning to the poetry I cannot but think that this is his reaction—a healthy but protective action—to the anti-intellectual state in which he found Scottish poetry and Scotland in general. This stance taken by MacDiarmid has been beneficial to Scottish poetry and also I think has served his poetry well in that, as with other of his creeds, he used it but was not slow to ignore it when it suited his purpose. As Yeats said 'passionate man must believe he obeys his reason'.



## HUGO MOORE

### NATIONALISM & SOCIAL REVOLUTION HUGH MACDIARMID IN POLITICS

Leaving aside as irrelevant to the problems of the modern poet, the example of, say, Voltaire, Beaumarchais, Goethe, Heine, Byron, Shelley, all of whom influenced the public affairs of their time, and not merely the literary fashions, it cannot be too strongly insisted on that the poet influences politics to an extent not generally realised in this country. If this is not the case, why bother to suppress him?—for there can be little doubt that the good old British system of total neglect, combined with philistine scurrility amounts to suppression as ruthless as the rigid censorship, the labour camp, and in cases of extreme recalcitrance, the bullet in the back of the neck, that we are always being told is the good old Russian way. Hugh Mac Diarmid, the political poet *par excellence*, has had rather more than his share of neglect and scurrility. The neglect, both official and popular is notorious, and was ended only, in the first case, by the grant to the poet of a Civil List pension—cadged by Richard Haldane from a victoriously indulgent Labour Government in 1945; and in the second, by the almost unprecedented wave of publicity which attended his 70th birthday celebrations (and yet, on the eve of his 75th birthday, not one of his books was in print on the commercial market). As for the scurrility, a little of it came, understandably enough, from English writers and critics—he hits out at them, so they hit back. But the interested English inquirer would be shocked to find the overwhelming mass of it emanating from the poet's compatriots, both critics and fellow-poets. (The list is too long to go over here; but some of the names on it can be found amongst the contributors to Duncan Glen's *Festschrift* "Poems in Honour of Hugh MacDiarmid". Even unsuccessful minor poets know a good band-wagon when they see one).

All poets are political, consciously or unconsciously—if we except the purely vegetable: for the poet whose work does not reflect the most vital and yearning involvement with the social forces of his time must be dismissed as not merely inhuman, but anti-human. Quite frequently, too, the poet is the pioneer and pathfinder in momentous political development, blazing and illuminating the trail, the mere politicians hipling behind, powerful suction that follows in the wake of the advancing *Zeitgeist*. MacDiarmid is such a poet.

He has had a hand in the founding of every Scottish Nationalist movement in existence—as well as one or two no longer extant. He founded the Scottish Home Rule Association in 1920; the University Scottish National Party in 1924; the Scottish National Party; the Scottish National League. The Scottish Secretariat was his creation in the twenties, in those days not content with its latter rôle as a centre for information and reference, but an energetic distributor of nationalist propaganda through local newspapers. As a speaker he was everywhere: no organisation was powerful enough to overawe him, none too humble to command his attention. Occasionally, powerful and humble alike got more than they bargained for, and he was not asked again; but this he undoubtedly regarded as a greater success than mere passive acceptance.

And this provides a clue to what has been his most positive and definite influence on Nationalist politics: his very presence on the scene prevents them from becoming respectable during his life-time, or within his sphere of influence, whichever proves to be the more far-reaching. As long as MacDiarmid is connected with it, Scottish Nationalism is a strong disadvantage to anybody who aspires to acceptance by what is loosely but usefully known as The Establishment. A literary man after a title, or a place in the list of a fashionable publisher, or a University lecturer hoping for a Regius professorship may be a Socialist or even a Communist without too much harm to his prospects; as a Scottish Nationalist he would have no chance whatever.

Negative and paltry as this might seem, a moment's reflection on the recent history of the Labour movement in Scotland convinces one of the positive advantages of it. Those "Scots on the make" as Barrie called them—and who better qualified to know?—soon got out of the movement, and the movement was, and is, better off without them. Think of the Giving back of the Stone, that bourgeois betrayal that seems so incredible even after it has actually happened, leaving the Stone of Destiny of far less use to the Scots, and the whole situation positively triter than if the thing had been left in Westminster Abbey. And all that the perpetrators of it could find for an excuse was that they had been told that the King (George VI) was heart-broken at the loss of the Stone. This servile attitude towards the Monarchy is typical of the middle-class element in Scottish Nationalism. They are the kind of rebels the Establishment likes—the kind who are never going to do it any harm.

MacDiarmid himself has gone into the matter in detail. Speaking at the presentation to him by students of the Scottish Universities of the Fletcher of Saltoun Medal for distinguished services to Scotland, he said: I have been opposed to the policies adopted by almost all the Scottish Nationalist organisations of the last 30 years and more, because I do not agree that we are likely to get any useful measure of Home Rule if we moderate our demands... approaching England in a servile manner is simply asking for a rebuff. Let England know we mean business, and we have our own ideas about what is our right, and we are more likely to get something than nothing. These should be our sentiments with regard to the demand for self-government, and that I cannot whittle down my demand and play the political game as they do is the reason why I cannot be a member of any of the existing organisations of so-called nationalists who seem to do nothing but expel each other—the reason why Dr John McCormick of the Government Association goes so far in his book *The Flag in the Wind* as to say: "I am certain that Hugh MacDiarmid has been one of the greatest handicaps with which any nationalist movement could have been burdened. His love of bitter controversy, his extravagant and self-assertive criticism of the English, and his woolly thinking were taken by many of the more sober-minded of our Scots as sufficient excuse to condemn the whole case for Home Rule out of hand".

Commented MacDiarmid. "I am afraid that the only wind Dr McCormick's flag ever fluttered in came from his own backside".

In the same lecture he said: I have conceived my task all along to be to try to keep the way open to an indigenous Scottish future without offering any guidance as to the state of things to come. That is for the Scottish people themselves to decide. I have no wish to prejudge the matter. That is why I have wished to see all Scottish Nationalists—all who are prepared to put the Scottish cause first and foremost—united, and not obliged first of all to pledge loyalty to the Throne, or to promise to stay in the Commonwealth, or any other precondition of that kind. I have always been willing to work with anyone else who is out simply and solely for Scottish Independence... and ready to trust our people later on to make what use of that regained independence they wish to make.

In 1934 MacDiarmid was expelled from the Scottish Nationalist Party, under its rule prohibiting members from belonging to any other political party. He had become a Communist.

His connection with the Labour movement went back to 1908 when, at the age of 16 he joined the I.L.P. Membership of the Edinburgh University Fabian Society followed, and he was also active in the formation of the University Socialist Federation. Before he was 20 he had served on a Fabian Research Committee on Agriculture, on behalf of which he surveyed the Scottish aspect of the matter.

He was with the British Army stationed in Salonika when he heard the news of, first, the 1916 Rebellion in Dublin, and following it on the heel, the Russian Revolution. Without the dual impact of these two events on the young Grieve's mind, we should no more be celebrating Hugh MacDiarmid's birthday than that of—(well, who shall I say?). The one focussed his sense of resentment against the English domination that was dissipating the best Scottish energies of his time; the other gave him the absolute conviction, rigidly held to this day, that to be a Socialist a man must also be on the side of the Revolution.

This latter attitude must be emphasised and insisted upon. It explains, not only how he has lived through three generations of Labour seekers after pelf, and emerged with clean hands; not only his contempt for Scots "Labour" M.P.'s and "Socialist" baillies, on whom, as he is fond of recalling, his friends John MacLean and Cunningham Grahame would not have condescended to wipe their boots: but also the fact that he has never fallen into the trap that yawns for the romantic nationalist, and has betrayed so many nationalist revolutions—the delusion that nationalism is an end in itself. "Nationalism" he asserts, "is useless without social revolution".

It explains why, of all the British parties, the Communist Party is the only one he nowadays has time for—although he has not much more in common with his fellow-members there than he had in the Scottish Nationalist Party. For what was the Communist Party of Great Britain to make of this utterance: "As a Socialist I am, it should be obvious, interested only in a very subordinate way in the politics of Socialism as a political theory; my real concern with Socialism is as an artist's organised approach to the interdependencies of life"? Or of this: "Let me admit that. I would like, say Stalin, better if, like Mustafa Kemal, he spent his long nights in drunken orgies with his friends and his women... I totally lack—and detest—the Puritanism that goes with much so-called Communism or Socialism". Not even his fellow intellectuals in the party are spared: "Notoriously anti-intellectual and most incompetent theoreticians;

professed dialectical materialists destitute of dialectic". A break had to come, and it came in 1936, when he was expelled from the party for a public statement to the effect that, while the Scots, Welsh and Irish contingents in the International Brigade got along splendidly together, nobody at all could get along with the English contingent. This, which seems to be an example of the sardonic humour of "The Drunk Man", was taken seriously by the comrades as an attack on Socialist solidarity, and was excuse enough to move and carry his expulsion. His dramatic rejoining of the party in November 1956, at a time when many of its oldest supporters were leaving it, owing to the events of that month in Budapest was much more than a mere gesture. He refused to see these events as the spontaneous uprising of a gallant Hungarian nation against foreign domination, and insisted that the rebellion was American and Fascist inspired. Not many people agreed with him at the time, but the subsequent appearance in the Lowland mining towns of Hungarian refugees carrying luggage inscribed "American Freedom Organisation" must have made many other people wonder.

No survey of Hugh MacDiarmid's politics would be complete without at least a reference to his interest in the Social Credit Movement, although this has, so far, found little explicit expression in his poetry—he has not yet written a "Hymn to Major Douglas".

MacDiarmid came into contact with the economic ideas of the Scots engineer Major C. H. Douglas at the time of his association with A. R. Orage and *The New Age*. Douglas, during his work on munitions projects during the First World War, had been impressed by the fact that many engineering developments, though from the engineer's point of view, *physically* possible, were impossible from the *financial* point of view, and this led him to make a distinction between financial credit, which is based on gold, and what he called "real" credit, which is based on such factors as raw materials, power and labour. He insisted that financial credit had fallen into the control of private bankers, who exploit the community for the purposes of private profit, and expounded a theory of a functional financial system concerned with the issue of "real" credit. This simple monetary theory, which both explains the workings of the capitalist system, offers a remedy for its unsatisfactory functioning in periods of depression or inflation without threatening its existence in any way, MacDiarmid saw as a useful "transition" measure, between the complete breakdown of capitalism, and its replacement by a workable Socialist economy; and there is a strong argument

in its favour in a region like the Scottish Highlands, where, short of an indigenous communism, such a system as Social Credit offers almost the only hope. Unlike Scottish Nationalism, however, Social Credit has been tried out (in Alberta in 1935) but presented within such a context of Bible Fundamentalism, anti-semitism and orthodox finance that the finished product would have been quite foreign to the mind of Hugh MacDiarmid, not to mention Major Douglas, to whom, indeed, it might have proved incomprehensible as well.

Monetary reform, Nationalism, Social Revolution. Three political ideas, not disparate, but not equivalent either, in all of whose names great and terrible mistakes have been made, but whose objective validity, for us at least, matters less than their value as fertilising influences on the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid; poetry, that in an inevitable process of cross-fertilisation, disseminates itself into the minds of the people, who may not yet realise that it is one of the few political forces they have anything to hope from. Until they do, let us do our best to honour this great political poet: enjoy his irony and his economics; his passion and his polemics; his tracts and his tendernesses: all gathered together in a mental grip awesome in its tensile strength; and all released at last in poetry the magic of which is inescapable forever.

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#### ON MACDIARMID'S MARXISM

An unco look nou Marx hes got!  
Wha'd ken him in sic form?  
The sickle o the Anglo-Scot  
And *malleus anglorum*!

TOM SCOTT

## KENNETH COX

### HUGH MACDIARMID'S NEOPLATONISM

Although not quite right *neoplatonism* most readily indicates the sort of experiences and ideas central to MacDiarmid's work. Occurring also in European poetry of the past their exposition in English or Scots cannot help being affected by the neoplatonist vocabulary they have already acquired. This is not to say they are all ideas traceable to Plato or Plotinus, or elements of an independent system adopting their terminology, or occasional intuitions now to be set in order with professional rigour. A complete and exact ticketing of MacDiarmid's conceptions is hardly possible and even a partial and approximate attempt might find more appropriate terms in Indian philosophy. But for the present purpose (to discuss their expression as poetry) *neoplatonism* will do: a departure from the customary may be postponed till this proves inadequate, much as a foreigner speaking English may fumble for words but only as a last resort drop into French.

Brutal as the comparisons may be, a rough check with two contemporary expositions will prevent the obvious from being overlooked. Bridges found in such a philosophy a consolation, something nice to think about in the garden, well seen at Oxford and politically safe. Yeats, never at ease in it and often hostile, kept from his early reading in Spenser and Shelley attractions to any idea strong enough to still annoyance. With Bridges the reader is made to feel the writer is congratulating himself on his possession of a wisdom all the more respectable for being Greek. With Yeats he feels the writer is temporarily submitting himself to an uncongenial influence in order to enhance a power to captivate and enthrall. With MacDiarmid, loose and rambling as the exposition is, he feels the writer is concerned to convey a conviction that this or something like it is the way things really are. The naivety of conviction hinders exercise of the restraints and evasions which confer grace. The comparisons which make us see MacDiarmid's poetry as egoistic and uncouth also, being bi-directional, measure the different degrees to which we find Bridges a prig and Yeats a fraud.

What makes neoplatonism in logic a system of such subtlety and complexity, the derivation of the Many from the One, is in the experience of the imagination so simple that in art the difficulty is rather to avoid monotony. Simple as they are, the actions



of the imagination are not all of equal force or the same direction. To distinguish their vectors is one of the functions of criticism. The margin of error is large: it ought all the same to be permitted to talk about these things.

An attitude of neoplatonism characteristically English is that of aspiration to the One. It is compatible with other attitudes evincing humility but directed upwards: appeal to mistress, obeisance to monarch, praise of God. These attitudes of supplication and subservience coalesce: Spenser's celebration of Heavenly Beauty has the same poetic vector as his flattery of Gloriana. The causes are no doubt social, the experience of ecstasy having been fitted into a system of feudalism where stress was laid on the difficulty and rarity of rising. If we remain inside the European vocabulary of neoplatonism successful union with the One must then be associated with acts conventionally disapproved: adultery, lèse-majesté, blasphemy. The aspiration may consequently, as in Shelley, be complicated by sentiments of revolt, a spurning of the actual condition, or somersault into the reversal of roles where the last becomes first and Punch hangs the hangman.

To escape this implication of the traditionally English but not originally Hellenistic concept the self-deification of MacDiarmid's poetry is perhaps better mentioned in terms of the identification of Atman with Brahman. In comparison with that of the feudalistic English, MacDiarmid's may be regarded as a neoplatonism turned inside out. Instead of a lovesick serf raising himself from the soil to salute the unattainable you have a genial, uncertain and ill-organised centre, occupied by MacDiarmid himself, from where the extremes of reality are contemplated in directions outward and downward. Both his and the English are momentary if not accidental states, owing little or nothing to spiritual exercise and coloured by emotion. The pitfall of the English is pretension, of the Scots, arrogance. As to the process of unification it seems that three stages are distinguishable: a rather disagreeable narcissism where the mind boosts itself without working, a preliminary irritable thrashing about among notebooks and recollections and, after a moment of incommunicable revelation, entry into the stage where the poet speaks with *a monopoly of movement and a sound like talking to God*.

MacDiarmid leaps the gap between One and Many at the price of rejecting the whole of the middle area of existence where the human comedy is played. His abhorrence of the middle was no doubt reinforced by circumstances: a country denuded of much of the apparatus of national life, its civilisation reduced to a mockery of its former self or replaced by organs of the *hideous khaki empire*. The *lonely at-one-ment with all worth*



while set up as standard in his lines to Doughty implies the rejection of *all the solemn plausibilities of the world* listed in *Lucky Poet*. MacDiarmid's contempt of the world, the recognition that it is *impossible to rise to position or power without a great sacrifice of human values at every upward turn*, the isolation which begins by avoiding contact and ends by destroying it, contains an intense objection to all movements upward. They are seen not only as proofs of ambition or as suicidal separations from reality but as evidence of a view of the world seen from the bottom or edge. Surely nothing less than a theory of metaphysics buttressed by nationalism and communism could have provoked his attack on the dytiscus beetle, harmless bug.

Established at the centre and ignoring the middle MacDiarmid's poetry reaches out to the remote extremities of the real. It is fascinated by the diversity of detail at the fringe. To the egalitarian intellect one thing is as good as another so long as it differs from everything else. (In MacDiarmid a certain favouritism is apparent for things not exactly animate but which under terrestrial conditions attach themselves to human life: landscapes, colours, jewels, viruses.) Hence his collections of particulars: the lists of stones in *The Kind of Poetry I Want* and *On a Raised Beach*, of tree-colours in *In the fall*, of manual gestures in *The Glass of Pure Water*, of languages and the Norn words for movement of the sea in *In Memoriam James Joyce*. Brilliantly as they are written, these catalogues are not, like those of Joyce or Rabelais, games of a mind exulting in its virtuosity and liberation from constraint. They are counterparts to the hymns to intellectual beauty. Reversing the adoration from below of an abstract and monotonous One, MacDiarmid's poetry celebrates the utmost multiplicity of the Many.

*... its open-eyed wonderment at the varied marvels of life,  
Its insatiable curiosity about the mainspring,  
Its appetite for the solution of problems...*

Suddenly one sees, with Al-Kindi and Pico della Mirandola: the first of the neoplatonists was Aristotle.

MacDiarmid draws on the sciences for knowledge of the detail running in parallel with them without overstepping the boundaries of discourse. Beyond speech lie the symbolical systems of logic, mathematics, chemistry etc. In its description of ultimate detail, MacDiarmid's poetry goes to the limit set by the rational imagination but not further. Unlike some poetry of today, it does

not use language in unusual ways in the hope of evoking by magic or chance a part of the reality that lurks in the gaps between words. It retains the expository character which dominated European poetry of the renaissance up to the romantics. *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.*

But though the unsayable cannot be said, its unsayability is sayable—at least up to a point and then one could say the unsayability of *that*. Having come to the end of what it can rationally and verbally expound MacDiarmid's poetry states the impossibility of going further.

*There is a minute indescribable difference  
Between one glass of pure water and another  
With slightly different chemical constituents.*

The recognition of limitation works as an assurance that the writer is doing all he can, will not retreat or slacken or carry you over the edge. The switch from description of possible detail to statement of the impossible difference, like changing gear or register, renews a flagging drive. Those who heard MacDiarmid read at the Jeannetta Cochrane theatre in London a year ago may have received a similar impression of an ability to surmount an inner hindrance by means of a self-excitation switching to another level.

The series is theoretically infinite but soon bores. The capacity for surmounting limitation of the rational is itself limited by something else: at poetry's height there supervenes silence.

*Like the haemolytic streptococcus  
In the sore throat preceding rheumatic fever  
But which, at the height of the sickness,  
Is no longer there, but has been and gone!*

The moment of union and creation is infinitesimal. Before and after extends the incomprehensible, the unutterable. Centre and circumference coincide: they are at one in only just being. The almost continuous sense in MacDiarmid's poetry of being not so much on the heights as on the edge, its borderer's complex, serves both for the emergence of the indivisible from chaos and for the utmost intensification of all reality.

- (a) *For this is the way that God sees life,  
The haill jing-bang o's appearin'  
Up owre frae the edge' o' naethingness.*
- (b) *Eternity's like that—a' thing keyed up  
To the heichest pitch as if  
A cataclysm's comin'—only it's no!*

The determined intellectualism of MacDiarmid's longer poems tends to make these concepts seem a mere epistemology. In all conscience his reaching out to the extremity of the known ought to be combined with an expansion of sympathy to the extremes of suffering. The combination does occur in certain of his lyrics, as in the justly admired *Empty Vessel* (*I met ayont the cairney / A lass wi' tousie hair . . .*). At other places in the work minute observation is found associated with poverty and passion. After the inventory of gestures in *The Glass of Pure Water* comes acknowledgement of the unsayable in misery.

*But among the people in these nearest slums I know  
This infinitesimal twinkling, this delicate play  
Of tiny signs that not only say more  
Than all speech, but all there is to say,  
All there is to say and to know and to be.*

The curious observation that the very poor are adept in the use of sign-language, elaborated in *In the slums of Glasgow*, is perfectly in accord with the total view. Beyond signs, beyond science, beyond social intercourse and formulable feeling, the demiurge of terror and desolation moves all. The deepest subjection incapable of revolt motivates social change, the unknown not describable incites the scientist to research, the unsayable, itself dumb, urges the poet to speech, and all activity is tested by its relevance to the unheard ground. The reversal is complete. In place of a man sunk in life and adoring the ineffable an articulate centre contemplates in itself the margin of the void from which it sprang.

*The mind creates only to destroy;  
Amid the desolation language rises, and towers  
Above the ruins; and with language, music;  
Its apprehension an activity of concentrated repose  
So still that in it time and space cease to be  
And its relations are with itself, not with anything external.*

It would be an easy academic exercise to show how MacDiarmid has used qualities traditional in Scots verse to serve objectives new to the tradition. In the *Scottish Chapbook* (March 1922) he wrote under the heading *A theory of Scots letters: The essence of the genius of our race is, in our opinion, the reconciliation it effects between the base and the beautiful, recognising that they are complementary and indispensable to each other.* The rasping rationality of Scots serves as vehicle of conceptual exposition, its vernacular keeps touch with actuality, its aggressive pedantry takes delight in detail, even its aureate terms may be considered to reappear in the coinages of science. Above all its familiar tenderness for things small and weak is purged of pity and humour to establish a tone of mind in which the lowest of the low can be regarded with admiration.

*Let what can be shaken, be shaken | And the unshakeable remain.* A poetry of singular purity and great courage, MacDiarmid's has to overcome in the minds of its readers not only its own limitations but also their remembrance of the defects of much other poetry called philosophical: the indifference of the transcendentalist to diction, faded abstractions, cadences echoing pulpit or soapbox, inordinate length. Like Spenser and Shelley MacDiarmid needs a long take-off. Like other expositions of states and attitudes his poetry is deficient in active verbs. Sometimes one is tempted to say the advantage of large-scale thinking is that the mind can afterwards handle ordinary things casually, letting fall in the course of its withdrawal a negligent contemptuously accurate phrase:

*And pickle-makers awn the hills.*

Putting aside the banal and the long-winded there are however passages attempting direct exposition of the central experience which impose themselves by virtue of swift movement and ardent will to instruct. Even when not engaged in polemic MacDiarmid's poetry tends to exert a didactic force to overcome the resistance expected of an ignorant, indifferent or incredulous audience. Lines and sentences prolong themselves and generate their successors as if flowing from a source too abundant ever to be exhausted and with an almost bodiless rhythm whose rationale is set forth in the poem which best uses it, *Lament for the Great Music*:

Deliberately cast in a non-rhythmic mould because the  
composers knew  
That rhythm is an animal function, whereas poetry and music,  
Involving no bodily activity of the artist in their making,  
Can exist in a purely psychological relation to society  
And would be equally "true" in a world of disembodied  
spirits.

Rhythm here must mean imitation of gesture or dance. There is also the movement of cerebral excitement where the top of the mind seems to glow while the muscles remain quiescent. Such a movement, as recorded on the electro-encephalogram or reproduced in verse, is smaller in variation but higher in frequency and capable of longer duration than muscular effort. Polysyllables with many light stresses, so intractable in animal verse, find in it easy accommodation. Scurrying over the mundane, they titillate the inner ear with a succession of unsubstantial whispers.

To the extent that neoplatonism derives from the experience of a moment its exposition in poetry tends to be either reminiscence or agitation. It depicts the imperfections of the world in relation to a remembered or potential whole. It therefore easily turns to advocacy of change in the sense defended in the *Second Hymn to Lenin*. Poetry of this kind, operating in the area between representation and action, has for essential function not the mere manifestation of meaning but its utterance with conviction piercing enough to persuade others, with the original energy art can canalise but not simulate.

## MATTHEW P. MCDIARMID

### HUGH MACDIARMID AND THE COLLOQUIAL CATEGORY

The academic critic, when he operates as such, is a historian. He is aware, or should be aware, that practical appreciation is a creative act and is therefore best performed by the poet. What he most usefully offers, or seeks to offer, is the enlightenment of fact, the illuminating comparison or generalisation that claims to have such a basis. The heroic effort of Hugh MacDiarmid to write a Scots poetry that exhibits a fully modern personality, and makes the same kind of appeal to literary sensibility as the best pieces of English poetry make, is a proper subject for his commentary. He can try to state what those limitations of the Burnsian tradition in verse were from which MacDiarmid sought to escape, and with his statement pose a little more clearly the questions of the nature and degree of that escape. That at least is what this writer will attempt here.

It seems to him that understanding of the twentieth century experiment in Scots verse requires an understanding of the eighteenth century one—that this was an experiment and one of the most interesting in literary history most critics seem to be unaware. The practice and commentary of the older poets unreservedly accepts one opinion, that the poetic uses of Scots must be prevailingly colloquial, with all the peculiar advantages and disadvantages that this implies. The interest of their experiment is that it created the only thorough-going colloquial poetry that literature knows. It was a breakaway from the tradition of formal, sophisticated expression and allowed its poets to present ordinary nature with a vigour and faithfulness that the contemporary English poets, for example, simply did not have the means of imitating. Wordsworth tried to imitate it but was soon compelled to resume the customary literary personality. It is in this respect of a truly popular mode of expression that Chesterton's famous line says no more than truth: "We are the people of England, and we have not spoken yet."

But the disadvantages were severe. A sophisticated and sensuous play of language, such as characterises the English and Continental poets (who are playing, as it were, to an audience of tradition-trained critics), and such as characterised the older Scots poets, the makars, was prohibited or at least greatly

limited by this popular poetic language. Foreign critics like Auguste Angellier, Friedrich Brie, and Mario Praz, find some kind of folk *ethos* in all Scots writing. Edwin Muir, casts about for such epithets as 'homely', 'realistic', 'materialistic', 'democratic', and so forth. And no doubt some such *ethos* has always dictated a more direct and less complex kind of utterance—the difference between Henryson and Chaucer, the comic difference between Burns's "A man's a man for a' that" and Schiller's unimaginable version of this, "millions embrace". But only a wilfully blind eye could make our twentieth century apologists insist, as they sometimes do, that Scots poetic diction always instinctively rejected the complex and the sensuous. Only for the déclassé Scots medium of the eighteenth century was it out of character to be sophisticated.

'Out of character' is the key phrase. Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns—even the last-mentioned, though his experience was most suited to the language—are poets acting a part, keeping strictly to a kind of working-class *persona*. Burns may know all about Rousseau's sentimental doctrine of the good instincts and the Man of Feeling, but he has to present it as a piece of homespun philosophy, "The heart ay's the part, ay./That makes us right or wrang." All of these poets read and admired the glittering satires of Pope, or the smooth-turned elegies and pastorals of Gray and Shenstone, or the idealising description of Goldsmith, but they avoided these forms and styles of expression as alien to the social rôle dictated by their medium. It is in this respect, as much as any real difficulty of speech, that English can be said to have "gravelled" Burns. They instinctively and deliberately kept to forms more dramatically appropriate to a peasant's or low-class townsman's experience—the economic tale like *Tam o' Shanter*, the realistic pastoral like Fergusson's *Farmer's Ingle*, the Ode on country life like Ramsay's version of Horace, the festive description like *The Jolly Beggars*, and so forth. It is an odd procedure, whereby the educated reader gets a sophisticated pleasure from the liberties allowed by the artistic convention of a folk *persona*. For it too is a convention.

And the experiment might have rested there, but for one very important innovation by Burns, who has often been unjustly criticised for only doing better what the more original and more sophisticated Fergusson had already done. When he turned finally to song-writing he knew that so far as his own work was concerned, he had exhausted all other possibilities of his colloquial medium—except for the serious narrative poem



of country-life, and the fairy-tale that Hogg was to develop. His song-writing was not a turning back but an advance. He could maintain his principle of a folk-decorum—what he called the “essential” “dash of the Doric”—and yet develop a more various and more specifically poetic personality than his familiar, discursive, verse had yet presented. The songs are folk-songs, and yet it is in them that we are most purely conscious of him as the poet *simpliciter*, least conscious of him as the peasant poet. It was, in fact, along this line of lyric development that Hugh MacDiarmid would initially try to advance as a Scots poet and something more.

The universality of Burns’s art is not questioned by this description, rather it is explained; but it does mean that for full appreciation of him we have to give up our normal nationless and classless habit as good readers. And we would not wish always to have our approach defined in this way. We would expect poetry also to cultivate a *general persona*, of the free kind that MacDiarmid describes as his ideal, “mind out for a lark”, that is, mind rejecting set stances, rôles, contexts. Of course, it must select one for any given purpose of subject-matter, but it will prefer the one that gives greatest freedom; and that will be one that is neither obtrusively colloquial nor obtrusively literary—what Dante calls the *vulgare illustre*. And if a choice has to be made, it will prefer the *illustre*, as Milton did, since that will let the writer rise to the height of whatever culture he has. The sheer impropriety of certain Milton-sounding stanzas, excellent in themselves, in *The Cottar’s Saturday Night*, shows that the context of Burns’s colloquial Scots simply did not allow him to say all that he wanted to say, and could have said. Milton could safely ‘fall’, as in the “Blind mouths” passage in *Lycidas*, but Burns could not rise. By and large, the more impersonal literary manner allows the poet to be most freely himself.

Does MacDiarmid achieve the freedom from social context that his racy description, ‘mind out for a lark’, demands? His most important predecessor in experimenting with a Scots freedom, Lewis Spence, flourished the slogan, ‘Back to Dunbar’. What Dunbar would have made of this ghost of himself heaven knows. Spence’s aureate diction only proves that he had read Dunbar, not that he was a poet. Beside Spence, Marion Angus and Rachel Annand Taylor pleasantly elaborated ballads and lyrics about the loves of very literary lads and lasses, that had a romantic sensuousness which certainly belonged more to pure poetry than ploughman poetry; but at best these were mere imitative refinements on the old themes and old forms. The



sensuousness that Edwin Muir had missed in Burnsian and post-Burnsian verse had been supplied, but there was no escape from the traditional context.

*Sangschaw*, MacDiarmid's own wood of birds (1925), made the escape. Faintly folksy, Kailyard notes can be heard in it at times, as in the somewhat sentimental close of *Watergaw* ("An' I think that mebbe at last I ken/What your look meant then"), and the conventionally, if splendidly picturesque *Crowdie-knowe*, with its "bleezin' trashy, French-like folk". But it is only a poet, to be appreciated simply as a poet, and not a Scots performer, who talks to us in lines like these—

"Their starry talk's a wheen o' blethers,  
Nane for thee a thochtie sparin,  
Earth, thou bonnie broukit bairn"

or in these—

"An' the roarin o' oceans now  
Is peerieweerie to me:  
Thunner's a tinklin bell, an' Time  
Whuds like a flie."

Reading such verse one does not have to concern himself unduly with thoughts of the poet being Scots, with a Scots theme in a Scots context. It is simply great verse; it is free mind, free expression. Another piece that entirely transcends categories is *Empty Vessel*.

Yet even this perfection can be thought limited, from the viewpoint of our definition of poetic freedom, "Mind out for a lark". There is firstly too little mind in it. We are being asked excessively to think with our senses, and though this is freedom on one side, it is restriction on another. Also, though this is independently perfect verse, reflection tells us that it is only its perfection that blinds us momentarily to its traditional connections. The "mysteries, infinitudes", that MacDiarmid says he wished to inject into Scots verse are not absolutely novel. They are conscious refinements of certain ballad effects, verses like these from *Tamlane*.

"About the middle o' the nicht,  
She heard the bridles ring.  
The lady was as glad at that  
As any earthly thing."

What has happened is that just as the Augustan and sentimental vogue for the realistic pastoral gave Scots colloquial poetry its opportunity once before, so now the current vogue of 'pure poetry' allowed the revivers of Scots to develop and refine traditional features of style. A quotation in *Sangschaw* from Housman, whose cultivation of the poetic thrill owes so much to the ballads, makes the sympathy clear to us. But still more revealing is MacDiarmid's confessed admiration about this time for Paul Valéry. I need only render two sayings of Valéry from his *Variété* to pinpoint what MacDiarmid is attempting: "At last we have a century when has appeared the will to isolate poetry finally from every other essence but itself", and, "There is a fine part of the soul that can enjoy without comprehending." The early MacDiarmid writes pure poetry. Later he will wish, unfairly, to say poor poetry. So much misleading talk has been heard about *Sangschaw* and *PennywhEEP* restoring ideas to Scots poetry. Ideas were precisely at this stage, what it avoided. One can only say that he successfully brought it into line with a European fashion of sensibility that was luckily sympathetic to its traditional genius.

But if MacDiarmid's early poetry is not quite so significant of revolution as has been claimed, it has at least, in the lyrics, freed the Scots poet from his folk *persona*. And in his next volume, *A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle*, a further degree of freedom is achieved, in his discursive writing. I say 'degree', because the manner of pure poetry is continued in much of it, and a style that un-self-consciously presents his individual, modern, intellectual personality is never fully developed. The traditional class character of modern Scots poetry is never wholly forgotten.

It is still "soun, no sense" that seeks to "faddom the herts o' men" in the version of the Russian of Alexander Blok that he calls *Poet's Pub*: "a silken leddy darkly moves" with no more specific motive than to put a dream in the poet's drink. And in a very important respect the moonlit Thistle symbolises Valéry's doctrine of aspiration to pure spirit, pure mind; symbolises it in its despair of realising itself. Valéry's theme and much of his indirect, suggestive, technique are easily identified in the most haunting of its lyrics, *O Wha's The Bride*. The 'gudeman' of this lyric demands an impossible perfection or purity of experience, and is told that he must content himself with the limited, impure but kindly knowledge of the senses, the flesh.

The reader will have noticed again that, though we are

aware of a modern poet's consciousness working intensely and freely on its matter, the 'mysteries and infinitudes' are conveyed by exploiting folk connotations, and above all that the tones (if not the overtones) are colloquial. This marvellous poetic "gallimawfry", to use MacDiarmid's own word is, of course, intentionally pitched in the colloquial key. The poet has—

"heard God passin wi' a bobby's feet  
Ootby in the lang coffin o' the street."

In Scots poetry it is still impossible to call God a policeman.

In brief, MacDiarmid, in his most ambitious poem, may write a more overtly poetical poetry than the Burnsian and post-Burnsian school attempted, and even when exploiting folk connotations free himself from the folk-image of the poet, but his technique and style offer no serious contradiction to the eighteenth century opinion that modern Scots poetry must be, in the main, a colloquial poetry.

That this became his own conscious conclusion is nowhere stated but the fact is patent that after *A Drunk Man* Scots is a dwindling element in MacDiarmid's work. And it seems significant that its decline coincides with his rejection of the ideals of 'pure poetry', and with his pursuit of a "poetry of thought and fact" opposed to what he now called his "irresponsible lyricism". For his new kind of poetry English became increasingly his medium. One would have supposed that there was enough thought in *A Drunk Man*, but it is admittedly thought of a kind that does not require exact statement and develops no argument; it explores impressions, aspirations, not doctrines; it gives no clear pictures.

Where Scots recurs, for the last time considerably, in the Hymns to Lenin, the tone is again colloquial, but now only matter-of-factly colloquial—as in *The Seamless Garment*, where he brilliantly suggests the genius of Lenin's dialectic and Rilke's philosophic verse by images that his cousin in the Langholm weaving shop might be supposed able to grasp.

The vogue for a Communist poetry had again seemed to give his colloquial medium a congenial task, but it was at the expense of that freedom from class context that his earlier poetry had won for the image of the poet himself. There is no vital difference, in that respect, between this Scots verse and Burn's conversational epistles to other peasant-poets. MacDiarmid is indeed unique among West European poets in trying to write a genuinely working-class poetry—a fellow communist like Louis

Aragon addressed himself strictly to the intelligentsia and surrendered nothing of his literary personality. Perhaps he could not resist the temptation to make a traditional use of his medium in a situation, that of the class-conscious thirties, that seemed expressly to invite it.

In the present writer's opinion his greatest verse was yet to come, verse such as *Birth Of A Genius Among Men*, but it was not Scots verse, thoroughly Scots as its rhetoric and sentiment are.

We have had two Renaissances of the Scots Muse, and there is no reason why, thanks to Hugh MacDiarmid, there should not be a third. When it comes it will be owing to the same kind of shift in contemporary viewpoint and sensibility as encouraged the not wholly dissimilar experiments of Burns and MacDiarmid, and its scope will be determined by the same stubbornly popular genius of the Scots tradition.

# SCOTTISH POETRY TODAY

An Anthology of New Poems  
Collected by

TOM SCOTT

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## KATHLEEN RAINE

### BY THE RIVER EDEN

#### I

Never twice that river  
Though the still turning water  
In its dark pools  
Mirrors suspended green  
Of an unchanging scene.

Frail bubbles revolve,  
Break in the rippling falls,  
The same, I could believe,  
Each with its moment gone,  
I watched in former years,

Ever-reforming maze  
Of evening midges' dance,  
Swifts that chase and scream  
Touching in their low flight  
The picture on the stream.

Heart is deceived,  
Or knows what mind ignores:  
Not the mirroring flux  
Nor mirrored scene remain  
Nor the rocky bed  
Of the river's course,

But shadows intangible  
That fade and come again:  
Through their enduring forms  
The glassy river runs;  
All flows save the image  
Cast on that shimmering screen.

#### II

Beside the river Eden  
Some child has made her secret garden  
On an alder strand  
Marked out with pebbles in the sand,  
Patterned with meadow flowers,  
As once I did, and was.



My mother, who from time past  
Recalls the red spots on the yellow mimulus  
That nodded in the burn  
To her alone  
Was that same child,

And hers, bedridden,  
Mused on an old cracked darkened picture of a salmon-river  
Painted in Paradise so long ago  
None living ever saw those tumbling waters flow.  
By her imagination made miraculous  
Water of life poured over its faded varnished stones.

All is one, I or another,  
She was I, she was my mother,  
The same child for ever  
Building the same green bower by the same river  
In her far and near unfading meadows of remembered summer.

### III

The lapwing's wavering flight  
Warns me from her nest,  
Her wild sanctuary;  
Dark wings, white breast.  
The Nine Nicks have weathered,  
Lichened slabs tumbled,  
In sand under roots of thyme  
Bone and feather lie,  
The ceaseless wind has blown;  
But over my gray head  
The plover's unageing cry.

IAIN CRICHTON SMITH

FAREWELL

We were gone from each other  
not that I was happy  
in this country  
nor not happy  
when your chair was empty

which you had filled (rounded)  
not as a theory  
but as a fruit ripening  
ripening towards harvest

in another country  
where some evening you'll see  
in another chair  
by your autumn nursery

a sky barred and ruled  
with a red cloud above  
and perhaps think of me  
late late in that world  
where your round corastacks are.

IAIN CRICHTON SMITH

"DEAD FOR A RAT"

What snarls  
in the corner?  
It wants to live  
It bares its teeth at you.

It wants to live  
more than you do  
Its whole body  
trembles  
with its want to live.

The fur arches from its body  
Its green eyes spark  
Its lips are drawn back from the teeth  
It hates you.

It hates you  
more than you hate it.  
Hamlet  
lie down  
in the sound of the trumpet

It quests you Hamlet  
Will you go  
behind the arras  
behind the tapestry  
will you go  
Hamlet  
with all the weight  
of your bright thought  
upon you?

Will you go Hamlet  
in your shuttling armour  
in your whirr  
of literature  
with your French rapier  
sparkling, veering?

VISITING HOUR

The hospital smell  
combs my nostrils  
as they go bobbing along  
green and yellow corridors.

What seems a corpse  
is trundled into a lift and vanishes  
heavenward.

I will not feel, I will not  
feel, until  
I have to.

Nurses walk lightly, swiftly,  
here and up and down and there,  
their slender waists miraculously  
carrying their burden  
of so much pain, so  
many deaths, their eyes  
still clear after  
so many farewells.

Ward 7. She lies  
in a white cave of forgetfulness.  
A withered hand  
trembles on its stalk. Eyes move  
behind eyelids too heavy  
to raise. Into an arm wasted  
of colour a glass fang is fixed,  
not guzzling but giving.  
And between her and me  
distance shrinks till there is none left  
but the distance of pain that neither she nor I  
can cross.

She smiles a little at this  
black figure in her white cave  
who clumsily rises  
in the round swimming waves of a bell  
and dizzily goes off, growing fainter,  
not smaller, leaving behind only  
books that will not be read  
and fruitless fruits.

## NORMAN MACCAIG

### INTRUSION

We sat by a Scottish stream  
in Massachusetts.  
A groundhog observed us,  
its whiskered face peering  
from a hole in the ground  
like a cartoon from World War I  
and through the still, bright air  
flew birds whose names  
I did not know.

Suddenly, in front of us,  
thirty yards away,  
a twenty foot limb  
crashed from an elm tree.

Now, three weeks later,  
in a Scottish house in Scotland,  
I tell myself  
it was one of a million  
dramatic acts  
in the world of nature's  
perpetually symbolic play  
that, if we had not been there,  
would have taken place anyway.

But it disturbs me. I try  
to see it as no other than  
the Scottish water crimpling away  
through America and  
the watchful face peering  
from its dugout across  
the No Man's Land that lies  
between me and everything.

## ROBERT GARIOCH

### MY FAITHER SEES ME

My faither sees me throu the gless;  
why is he out there in the mirk?  
His luik gaes throu me like a dirk,  
and mine throu his, baith merciless.

Taen-up aa wi my affairs,  
what I maun spend, what I maun hain,  
I saw throu the black shiny pane  
he tuik me geynear unawares,

I see him, by the winnock-bar,  
yerkan his heid as I yerk mine;  
luik maikan luik in double line,  
ilk of the ither is made war.

Yon luik has flasht frae my faither's een  
in Edinbrugh, and hou faur hyne  
in Sutherland, and hou lang syne  
in Stromness, Dornoch, Aberdeen?

I beik about my cosy, bricht,  
fluorescent electric warld.  
He sees me yet, yon norland yarl;  
I steik my shutters guid and ticht.

---

maun hain: must save    winnock-bar: window    war: worse  
hyne: distant    beik: bask

# ROBERT GARIOCH

## BRITHER WORM

I saw a lang worm snoove throu  
the space atween twa stanes,  
pokaan its heid, if it had ane, up  
throu a hole in the New Toun,  
up throu a crack ye wad hardly hae seen  
in an area of stane,  
unkenn'd upliftit tons of mason-wark  
piled on the soil,  
wi causey-streets, biggit of granite setts,  
like blank waas flat on the grund,  
plainstane pavements of Thurso slabs laid  
owre the stane-aircht cellars,  
the area fifteen feet down, wi weill-fittan flagstanes,  
Regency wark.  
Nou, in my deedit stane-and-lime property awntert  
a nesh and perfect worm,  
and I was abasit wi thochts of what was gaun-on  
ablow my feet.  
that the feu'd and rentit grund was the soil  
of the Drumsheuch Forest,  
and that life gaed on inunder the grund-waa-stane  
and had sent out a spy,  
jalousan som Frien of the Worms had brocht  
a maist welcome shoure,  
whan I on my side of the crust had teemit  
a pail of water,  
meaning to gie the place a guid scrub-doun  
wi a stable-besom.  
Sae a lang, saft, sappy and delicate  
pink and naukit cratur  
neatly wan out frae atween thae weil-fittan  
chiselled, unnaitural stanes.  
I watched and thocht lang of the wonders of Nature,  
and didna muve,  
and thocht of the deeps of the soil, deeper nor the sea,  
and I made nae sound.  
A rat raxt frae a crack atween twa stanes.  
My hale body sheuk wi the grue.  
It keikit at me, and was gane.

snoove: glide	biggit: built	waas: walls	awntert: adventured
nesh: delicate	jalousan: guessing	teemit: emptied	raxt: reached
grue: shudder	keikit: peeped		



## JEAN ANN ANDERSON

### MY MOTHER HAS SENT ME TO YOU

My mother has sent me to you.  
Her message comes in secret:  
Hear it in the wind  
Which ripples the long grass  
On Arthur's Seat.  
It comes in strength:  
See it in the rock,  
The sheer walls of the Castle.  
It comes in power:  
Feel it in those stones  
Which watch the weather  
In the crooked glen.  
Hear, see, and feel it now,  
And make it live.

### UNICORN

Picking its way between  
The sandstone rocks,  
It came to the water's edge.  
Each silver hoof was poised  
Reluctantly above the sand  
Before it stepped.  
It stood a moment,  
Watchful, unafraid,  
Sensing the running tide.  
Then, suddenly aware  
Of human scrutiny,  
It turned,  
Its white enchantment  
Leaping up the cliff,  
My gentle unicorn.

## SANG SONNET

Sing frae the hert, but set the harns til rhyme,  
 For thochtless words (thae banes that want the marrow)  
 Maun brak like kindlin ablow the aix o time,  
 And glaikit sangs sune cowp the aipple-barrow,  
 Dingan the aipples down in fousome stour  
 To dee forgotten, tint in thon same hour.

A makar screived a hunder year sinsyne  
 Sae monie beuks the press ran short o letters,  
 But nou there 's fient the sowl could speak a line  
 O' aa the lines he whummled out (puir craiturs),  
 Like brandermuck they're soopit down the drain  
 Afore the flood o time, the skaichan rain.

Anither screivit only ae bit sang,  
 Sae skeelie-short that time can wark nae wrang.

---

harns: brains	kindlin: firewood	glaikit: moronic	cowp: overturn
dingan: dashing	tint: lost	screived: wrote	fient: no whit
whummled: thrown out	brandermuck: rabbish	soopit: swept	
skaichan: scavenging	skeelie: skilfully		

ROBIN FULTON

ATTIC FINDS

from a thirty year old pile  
he pulled the inner works of a toy engine  
nailed to a slab of wood for a boyish experiment

it made him think of the stumpy carcase  
which was all that was left of a dead stoat  
after his nervous attempt to skin it neatly

another find (surely older)  
was a transfer in a brittle envelope  
he soaked it and gingerly peeled it out

a bright wet smile  
a girl in primary colours with  
too many ribbons and an overlong skirt

her hands said welcome  
but as the wet skin dried and shrank  
her smile was agony and she was grasping for help

A CALVINIST IN SPITE OF HIMSELF

Of the Bible he knew what Chaucer's doctor knew,  
they said he cured incidentally  
pausing for breath or to remember a name,

he was always late, time was for him  
how long a salmon would take to tire  
as he played it round the maze of lines in his head,

or how many months he'd have to wait  
for his latest flower, sealed from the murderous wind,  
to flood his hothouse with the mediterranean.

Colours of a dying fish, a dying bloom,  
the world's rewards, his well-wishers sighed  
wishing his butterfly soul would repent.

Right enough, when he came to it  
at last he found a bleak white text  
and a heaven of frozen rivers and January skies.

## TOM SCOTT

### FERGUS II: Scotland 1967. (Proem)

Mansions out o cairns?\* Certes,  
There's biggin eneuch gaes on here in Embro  
Toun, whether o mansions I dinna ken,  
But out o siccan cairns as George Square,  
Princes Street, New Town, the Royal Mile.  
"Vandalism" here gangs wi a style.

Wes ever a toun, since tounskip first began,  
Like this toun? The auld rig-bane,  
Smoorit wi reek, that they uised to caa Auld Reekie,  
A lang straggle o Lands heezed up on a cleuch,  
Savaged by the wowf-winds aff the Forth,  
A Stewart capital aa thae years afore  
England tempit their House to suicide  
In yon fell trap they set aside the Thames;  
This toun nou, Scots in little but name,  
Is become an ex-capital o an ex-country.  
The English landlord squats upon the neck  
That English kings could never bou for lang;  
Our Holyrood Palace, a museum-piece for bairns,  
Parlament changeit for a messan's kennel  
For a Ministerial dog in Downing Street.

See how aa the roads thrang in here  
Tö the toun's centre, conveyor-belts o cars  
Clankan heavy as the chains on convict-gangs,  
Tho whit the crimes they dree for, I dinna ken.  
It's as if the dream o European empire  
Had collapsed, and ilkawhaur, as here,  
Whit passed for Civilization's collapsan wi't.  
The tribes are on the move, tho maistlins whaur  
They airt at they couldna say. Some  
Ken fine, for Scotland mair nor maist  
Ships awa her fowk til ithér lands  
Wi prodigal abandon: but maist are here  
Birlan about in coracles o cars  
Hittery-hettery, aaweys-naeweys, hame  
Some roond-about road juist for hame again,  
Like aimless gowdfish sooman roond a tank.

\* Last phrase o Fergus I.

But for this merry-go-round o lossit sauls  
 They nou demand a Ring-Road, symbol  
 For aa o the vicious circle they are in,  
 A social snake eftir its ain tail—  
 And for this they're gaena kaa doun hauf the toun  
 At cost o a hunder-an-fifty million pund,  
 Tho they canna spare a fiftieth pairt o that  
 For a Festival Centre, a Theatre, Opera House  
 And Grand Hotel combined! They want  
 Aa monuments o the past in George Street  
 Cowpit doun—no because they gar  
 A decent Scotsman scunner at the sicht,  
 But forthat they're in the road o the gret god Car.

Embro! Embro! my bonnie bride  
 Gien owre tō whurin wi Usury and Profit  
 Like ony puir, pathetic slut in Leith!  
 Your children pimp ye out for gain and gear,  
 Rejoice that the furrin gangster straddles your limbs,  
 And count only the payments, never the price.  
 Lig ye there in your hills, your generous curves  
 Sprawled in the cauld o a haar-hace nicht,  
 Ravaged by England, capitalist and usurer,  
 Your ain capital nature filed and degradit  
 In provincial squalor. Lig ye there  
 Amang your streets, the milk-bottled dawn,  
 The emblems o sterilitie in close and park,  
 Scotland shame—Fergus ance mair  
 Will gaither your auld, dishonourit limbs and breists  
 To press til his heavy hert.

#### Here,

In the dawn air, see frae the Castle Cleuch  
 The geldit kingrik sprawl on Scotland's corp;  
 The Calton jail pairtners St Aundrae's House  
 (Yon ither jail that keeps the smeddum o Scotland  
 Lockit in laithsome toils in Whitehall's pouer  
 Like a Genie shut in a bottle). And there  
 A faus Greek temple witnesses the shame  
 That socht to mak Embro Athens o the North  
 Insteid o Athens Embro o the South ...

---

biggin: bulding siccan: such rig-bane: back-bone smoorit: smothered  
 Lands: tenements cleuch: cliff messan's: lapdog's thrang: crowd dree for:  
 suffer for ilkawhaur: eachwhere airt at: direction anmed at kaa down: knock  
 down haar-hace: fog-hoarse geldit: castrated smeddum: gumption

## SYDNEY GOODSIR SMITH

### SEAL POEM

When it haps it haps  
The selkie sings

The green swaw rins in the skerry

When can love eer love deny  
The love it brings?

A selkie sings——  
The dragon's hairt——  
A deer's fuit rinnan——  
Things seen, things kent  
Is all.

Hair like the sun's sheen, selkie,  
Sun and mune thegither there,  
Mued in the wind,  
Gently steered——  
A wee fine wind on the sea,  
A ruffle, juist, mune-shot, sun-shot,  
Autumn and spring there met.

The silent swan mued on the loch——  
All hushed, the wind still——  
At dayligaun I saw it.

High on the hills  
The broun gerss souchs in the wind,  
In fits, in gusts, it sings its ain green sang——  
And aye abune  
The silly cauld oblivious mune  
Swings by regairdless,  
White in the blivious blue,  
And casts her licht upon us still  
——She can dae nae ither.

We, the silly thralls of love  
Read in her wir ain twin thochts  
Whar's nocht but vain imaginings.  
——And yet the ancient symbol-book  
Untarnished sheens, for all the new-found wonderment  
Of Gagarin and Glenn  
And the great tribe o' new Columbuses,



Heroes o' the age—God kens!  
(Or does he?)  
Yet they flee through all his firmament  
Like gods theirsels.

Argonauts, whar is the Gowden Fleece the day?

And aa the while  
We twa sit here  
Earth-bound  
In a blaze o' licht  
Amid the pub's thick brabblement  
Alane and insulate—  
Her een sheenan,  
Dark, bleezan,  
Lammer licht in the gless glinkan  
(Salt the sea whar selkies rin)  
Licht in the gless refractit,  
Ay, be Jazus, fractured intae spales o' licht,  
Man, but lammer, lammer,  
The gowden liquor skinklan—  
Ah, the mercies!

Belt up, brither,  
Brither meenister o' Gode!  
Help us, Sir. Ye could  
If ye cared a hoot, Sir. If ye could ... sir——  
——Napalm——Mercy——  
We think.  
But powerless.  
Like you.

Cauld the gerss outbye in the nicht——  
The hairt warm here, contentment.  
The hills snug in the mist——  
Are ye cauld, sweet seal,  
Seal Baby?

Are ye cauld? No. No. Never cauld.  
The globe turned in the gale:  
It was the morn come——

A sudden thing, it seemed.  
Nocht said. The world changed then.  
It was just tomorrow days.

——Nae end in sicht.  
Nae end, it seems ... nae end ...

It seems ...

Seal Baby ...

## SYDNEY GOODSIR SMITH

### SERPENT OF OLD NILE

The glisk o' an ee  
Black seas rinnan in the voe  
Deep under cliff  
The touch o' her leg, Dear God!

Cauld outbye  
The room snug  
The leaf in autumn  
Haar frae the Forth  
The street icy—

Hiech abune  
The gibbous curlit mune  
Looks on a world grown desperate  
And we should care, surely...

What a lass I touched then  
—A serpent.

Cover me, Nile.

---

#### SEAL POEM

selkie: seal   swaw:swell   dayligaun: twilight   gerss: grass  
souchs: whispers   brabblement: babble   lammer: amber

#### SERPENT

spales: splinters   glisk: glance   voe: inlet   haar: mist

## ALAN BOLD

### THE SURFACE

"Wittgenstein liked to draw an analogy between philosophical thinking and swimming: just as one's body has a natural tendency towards the surface and one has to make an *exertion* to go to the *bottom*—so it is with thinking."

— Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*

Art extolleth anarchy; I've found  
Myself discouraged by the dying act  
My friends consider life. They have drowned  
For ages in an empty pool—a fact  
I cavil at. The white tiled bottom keeps  
Them straight. If, making water, art alone  
Showed life to them what then? When water seeps  
Beneath your feet you float or hold your own.

And when it bubbles round your neck you must  
Not drown—you can't do it at once. You can  
Resist the simple feelings of disgust  
And curb the attitudes that sneer. A man  
Means so much more than smartness signifies:  
There's so much more that's missing when he dies.

## ALAN BOLD

### SEXAGENARIAN

I listened to the pebbles shaking in the sea.  
Morning, and every one of them suggested a life,  
Every submerged sound magnified itself and spray  
Splashed them one to one while the wave's edge showed bright  
In the sunlight. Any fanciful notion that  
Demosthenes would appear and put his mouth onto  
One of the pebbles under my feet was suppressed.  
To crash the stones together is to make a loud  
Impact and to stand on them so that in the sand  
Their contour is left is to make a mark, tiny  
Perhaps, but in the context of one's self alone  
Significant enough to make the worms retreat,  
To make the colour lighten round the stone, to make  
The grains more compact. As if you were then the one  
Who mattered at the moment, magnificent beside  
The strands of damp seaweed drying up in the sun.  
A little later when the birds punctuated  
The nimbostratus clouds and the skyline darkened  
To a deep grey drizzle, the surface of the sand  
Hardened, and condensation in the air made drops  
Pelt by my feet. I had reckoned without weather.  
I sheltered in a dingy iron shack. Alone  
At first, I stared blankly at the hollow water  
Made for. The puddle formed and as the droplets honed  
The pavement like the hoofs of horses thumping hard  
Packed ground, a figure joined me. Happily I smiled,  
Anxious to exchange my energy and my wit  
With the stranger. But as I talked, he only smiled  
Back and cocked his head. Feeling like a foolish child  
It penetrated that he did not understand  
One word of what I said. To show he felt the cold  
He pulled his collar up and then he rubbed his hand  
Against his knee. This was a summer shower yet  
I should have known no natives would have ventured out  
So early in the morning. At first a blue yacht  
In the distance gave me excuse, then I turned round:  
"You don't speak English". He laughed and shook his head.  
Mine spinned. The ideas I had, the way I wanted  
To tell this man about them. The things I could have said

To him. He was from Spain; I gathered that later.  
The big clock nearby struck ten o'clock. By the time  
I was ready to leave the sea shore the water  
On the pavement had evaporated. The smell  
That lingers after rain detained me for a moment.  
For a moment, only for a moment  
I could become a lawyer or a businessman  
Perhaps. Ah! from rags to riches in a day—  
That would be the way. Oh! I could peacefully make  
Peace for the world, or draw up a flawless plan  
For global government. But as I talked it only smiled.  
My physical self that had not moved from its bed.  
It penetrated that it did not understand  
One word of what I thought. So I am left alone  
With sixty years upon me and the lovely dream  
That haunts me. My rented room, the rag with which I dried  
My present tears: these have all stayed. And yet I seem  
As far from gaining riches as when first I tried.

A.D. MACKIE

STIRLINGS IN WINTER

Thrang on the buchties o' a tree,  
Forenent my verra house,  
Anes-errand for my bairns to hear and see,  
Chirman sae crouse,  
Ye haud your pagan Yule soiree,  
A bird to ilka ryce:  
O wad I had the pouer  
My lines wi' yours to harmonise,  
Like some Provençal troubadour!  
In words to render clear  
Your shrills and hoots,  
The echo o' your cheer,  
Your gay salutes,  
Your shrieks o' pleasure sheer,  
And reproduce  
The wild and careless grammar  
O' this primeval jargon that ye yammer...  
Though fain,  
In vain,  
I spier  
For rhyme  
To chime  
Wi' your incessant clamour;  
In vain I seek  
The words to speak  
O' this clamjanfray that ye muster—  
A duskie crew  
On ilka bou,  
Like foliage dark, or fruit, ye cluster,  
Syne aff ye flee  
In flicht unanimous and swift,  
Like a sudden faa  
O' shimmeran snaw  
Stiplan the glimmeran winter lift.  
Attour the hicht ye swerve and swee  
Joined in your cheerie jamboree,  
Spreidan out and drawan in,

Aefauld, as ane, yet aabodie free.

I hae seen ye in the spring

Gether your store o' trash and strae,  
Of oo and feathers, girss and string.

In some boss trunk your nest to lay;  
And I hae seen your gleg ee merk

The worm's dark cast amidst the divot:  
Perkie your glossie heid wad perk

And on ye'd stave, ramstam, and pivot,  
Your neb intil the grund to drive

And howk a hole and dourlie ryve  
The plump provender frae the mulls

To stap the wee anes' gantan bills.

Your plumage black but aye a-shimmer,

Like polished airn its changean sheen,  
Wi' monie a daizzlan glisk and glimmer,

Leams like the barrel o' a gun,  
Flashan earth's couthie, emerod green,

The hevins' blue, the glint o' the sun,  
Spreckelt and strippit wi' buff and white,

Wi' spangelt haffets and sparklan croun,  
Fernietickelt on back and kyte

And swyre and thrapple gem-bestrewn,  
Bricht tinselt breist, bejewelt wame—

An antrin sicht,

Baith black and bricht,

Wi' wings and tail like coals in flame,

Plutonic mirk

And hevenlie licht.

And I hae seen ye on the knowes,

In bent and foggage, bucht and fank,

Scouran the fleece o' tips and yowes

For kaid and ticks on back and flank;

And I hae heard ye frae your perch

On pole or rhone or chimlay-tap,

Wi' eydent breist and thrapple search

Through native sounds that clack and snap

For blackie's mellow flutan notes,

And rypan frae the verra throats

O' shilfa and o' yellae-yite

The variations o' their dyte.

Laverocks and linties hae their lays,  
 Gowdspinks and felties gled the lug,  
 But ye can capture onie phrase  
 Frae mavis or frae humble speug.  
 A maister's instrument ye blaw—  
 The virtuoso o' them aa!

---

Thrang: busy    buchties: branches    forenent: before  
 sae crouse: so cosily    ilka ryce: each living    clamjanfray: gathering  
 lift: sky    swee: dodge    aefauld: united    oo: wool    girss: grass  
 boss: hollow    gleg: quick    divot: clod    ryve: tear    mulls: sail  
 gantan: yawning    airn: iron    glisk: glance    leams: gleams  
 couthie: kindly    haffets: cheeks    fernietickelt: spotted    swyre: neck  
 thrapple: throat    wame: belly    antrin: unusual    knowes: hillocks  
 foggage: foliage    fank: pen    eydent: diligent    rypan: stealing  
 shilfa: chaffinch    yellae-yite: yellow-hammer    dyte: song  
 laverocks: larks    linties: linnets    gowdspinks: goldfinchies  
 felties: missel-thrushies    mavis: song-thrush    speug: sparrow



## RAYNE MACKINNON

### LOST AND REGAINED

Far in the west, light lingers, curled-up clouds  
Hold in the rain; nearer at hand, the firs  
Whose upturned brushes sweep the pale sky clean;  
Full fields of wheat sway in the suckling breeze,  
And hills shine through the evening air, like stones  
In a clear sunlit pool. All this I see  
Or guess at. For unable to search out  
The world's small secrets, like a nosing dog,  
I must explore my sight, must always read  
Variety into a stable scene.  
Wordsworth himself was free, and free he sensed  
A far-off mystery breathing at the back  
Of nature's unspoilt world. Yet soon he grew  
Old, and sucked at fresh dugs with withered lips.  
He sought in vain a shattered strangeness, feigned  
The old deep joy. I lost this joy as well;  
Nature was dead to me, and I to her.  
The streams could run down iron grooves, for all  
I knew, and mountains were so many tons  
Of rock, no more. But now once more I sense  
Not strangeness, but the world I always knew.  
The old familiar mystery that binds  
The solid shadows of the night. Now woods,  
And fields, and wind-whipped clouds, and summer skies  
Say "Here we are; you knew us once; know this:  
To wonder is man's nature; the stale self  
Can't hold us out; for we were always there."  
And listening to their message, I accept.  
The heart-beats of the fluctuating world,  
The real world that we see on every side,  
Hold harmony enough for all our needs.

RAYNE MACKINNON

AFTER GOETHE'S 'SURPRISED BY MIGHT.'

It seeks fruition in the sea's broad bounds,  
Pours itself down from cloud and barren rock;  
Careless of calm reflections, what can block  
Its surging raging thirst for lower grounds?

But Oreas sweeps up both hill and wood,  
And sends them crashing down upon the burn;  
Its probing flow, outsavaged, has to turn,  
Its outlet blocked, and seethes like boiling blood.

The flood, frustrated, weakens, then swells back  
Up to the hills where it was once a spring,  
Choked back from Proteus, whom it sought in strife.

It shudders, then lies low, becomes a lake,  
A rippling mirror, on whose murmuring  
The stars look down, and see a new-born life.

## GEORGE HARDIE

### LAMENT FOR SCOTTISH POETS

This Scotland, which gave me voice  
and, in time, will silence my singing,  
has a vampire's way of taking love  
and rewarding those who give  
with a heart breaking scorn which kills.  
And yet, the victim poets sing  
although they know the outcome of their song  
before the first word has been uttered.  
So it has ever been.  
So it was with Fergusson  
whose bedlam screams  
would be a fitting benediction  
on this race.  
Poor, mad poet; fate surely used you ill  
to have you born a Scot.  
The poet, the lover and the fool,  
in Scotland these are ever three in one  
for nowhere has poetic loving  
been more wastefully employed  
than on the callous Scottish air.  
But still the poets sing,  
and feel they must,  
like cage birds with no hope of freedom  
except within the rhythm of their song.

DAVID MORRISON

IN THE EARLY MORNING

Whit bird is that  
That sings tae me  
Frae the first licht  
I canna see.

No, I canna pu back  
Yon velvet, green goon  
Atween me an the winnock.  
At sic a licht ma body  
Wad twitch an screich  
At the lack o sleep,  
An the wark tae be done  
In a few hoors.

Whit bird is that  
That sings tae me  
Frae the first licht  
I canna see.

Ach, pu back the goon  
An see the wonder  
That ithers willna see.

## RONALD GASKELL

### ST. ANDREWS

#### I

Low tide: the rocks beneath the castle  
Rinsed like broken teeth by the withdrawing wave.

Balked by the graveyard  
The path curves, riding out over the reef,  
Straightens, pauses to take its bearings, drops  
To the harbour.

In the brilliant air  
You have a glimpse of the streets that first gripped  
This headland: bare, cobbled,  
Yet a town as prodigal of priests and scholars  
As of men shaped and hardened by the sea's trade.

Far out  
Light, running before the wind, keels over suddenly.  
A gull  
Cries overhead. Then the sweet taint of gas.

Below the hill  
The town sprawls to where  
Its first streets converge, halt  
Before the graveyard, where the wreck of the cathedral  
Stares still  
Over tombs and harbour  
To the flickering sea.

The gull drops,  
Troubling the folded wave, closes, rocks there.

## II

Evening. The sea balanced  
Between tide and tide  
Curls, caves,  
Shudders over the compact sand, levelling, dispersing.

The streets are quiet.  
Through the cold dusk  
Windows smile. St Andrews in an image:  
The serene glass  
Gazing inward  
At its rugs, hats, books, shortbread, golf balls —  
Something for everyone.

For the nature lover? Not the park only,  
Not bunker and fairway only,  
But through the town itself, along the burn, the Ladebraes walk  
Skirting field and hedgerow, loitering  
Among oak and sycamore bowed overhead —

‘Wild flowers have been planted in this wood:

    Please do not pick them’ —

To emerge dishevelled  
At a road that brings the traveller back in safety  
To the world of man.

### III

The air darkens.  
In the deserted streets  
Only the wind stirs.

Toledo

Secure still  
Beneath a clear sky, the mountain quiet,  
Its doors, fast; only the wind stirring  
Uneasily in the deserted streets.

Below the obscured ramparts of the castle, pools  
Dip in the shifting light. The swept wave  
Lunges through the pitted rock, rears  
Against the cliff, grasps, tears, falls back,  
Swirls, drawing its broken water  
To itself again, enlarged, mounts,  
Plunges into the dark.

Above the thwarted spray  
The path curves, straightens, drops  
To the harbour.

The wind rises,  
Cuffing the travelling waves.

The night  
Fills with silence  
Invaded only by  
The supplication of the cathedral to a clear sky,  
And beneath it  
Towards the pallid sand, ignored, the steadily  
Advancing forearm of the sea that gathers  
The dying into one darkness with the dead.

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